

- APATHY IS BORING -

YOUTH FRIENDLY GUIDE

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Never before in history has youth engagement been more urgent for social organizations.

Baby boomers are gradually retiring and will become less active in the coming years and decades. Without attracting young people to replace boomers as volunteers and leaders, organizations simply cannot sustain their current level of activity.

- THE YOUTH-FRIENDLY GUIDE -

What does your organization know about this new generation of changemakers? Your knowledge of how to engage youth can spell the difference between flourishing and fizzling in this new landscape.

Even if you and your organization don't serve youth directly (but especially if you do), young people make up a largely underrepresented portion of your potential support base and of the broader community you serve. It's time for organizations to start plugging in to the energy of youth engagement.

Whether you're hoping to reach youth as staff, clients, volunteers, supporters, donors, board members, or maybe even, your next Executive Director, you're going to need to get serious about a comprehensive and targeted strategy to reach, impress, and retain young people. Otherwise, we're going to find some other way to make a difference. The foresight to invest in a new generation of supporters today is crucial to your organization's viability in the future.

HOW TO BE YOUTH-FRIENDLY

This guide is part of Apathy is Boring's comprehensive Youth-Friendly program. The Youth Friendly program is designed to provide the tools and services your organization needs to stay vibrant for many years to come while making youth feel important, valued, and engaged in your work.

Apathy is Boring's Youth-Friendly program features tailored products for all your youth engagement needs including:

Online resources

Workshops and presentations

Youth-Friendly audits

Organization specific consulting

www.youthfriendly.com

The best thing about our Youth-Friendly philosophy, is that Youth-Friendly is also 'People Friendly'; practicing good youth engagement, will improve your organization's ability to reach out and engage all types of supporters in your work.

WHAT IS THE YOUTH-FRIENDLY GUIDE?

Apathy is Boring's Youth-Friendly Guide is designed to support organizations as they reach out to and engage young people aged 18-35 in decision-making.

Inside you will find all the background information you need to know to start understanding today's youth, along with key principles every organization should live up to in order to create opportunities for youth, from programming to top-level decision-making.

Drawing on an extensive analysis of ethnography, developmental psychology, volunteer management research, and years of experience in the non-profit sector, Apathy is Boring has developed our Youth-Friendly program to address the needs of organizations big and small.

This Guide isn't about youth engagement for the sake of being nice, it is about recognizing the pressing challenges that organizations face, and understanding how building relationships with youth can directly address these challenges.



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WHAT'S INSIDE

The Youth-Friendly Guide is a primer for all things youth-engagement.

We'll talk about why you need youth. If you haven't already realized it, today's organizations will face harsh times ahead unless you start tapping in to the creativity, energy and drive of today's youth.

We'll give you the Coles Notes version of what's up with youth these days and help decode the phenomena of this generation. Understanding our reality will help you build the empathy and the context you need to break through the barriers we're facing.

We'll share our best tips for reaching out to youth and bringing us into your organization. Keeping up with likes and Tweets is necessary but insufficient to really get youth in the door. We'll fill you in on the secrets of getting offline support from those Facebook fans.

We'll take you on a deep dive into Apathy is Boring's Five Youth-Friendly Principles. With these in mind you'll have the building blocks you need to initiate a cultural shift within your organization that will push your organizational processes, decision-making structures, high-level strategies, and day-to-day activities to become more dynamic, inclusive, technologically-integrated, and accountable.

We'll paint you a picture of what being youth friendly looks like and share with you the ideals we hold and strive toward. What will it mean to share decision-making? To collaborate and to close knowledge gaps? Hint: it means increased engagement for everyone – not just youth.

Last, we'll leave you with just a little word of warning. All the initiatives, programs and strategies you initiate must be underpinned with positive attitudes and the belief that youth are valuable partners, and not problems to be solved or simply a group to be served. Ageism has many faces, all of which youth can sense from a mile away.

By the time you've finished reading, we guarantee you'll be swimming in ideas and ready to pounce on opportunities to plug into youth energy and bring us in as your next staff members, clients, volunteers, supporters, donors, board members, or, maybe even, your next Executive Director.

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HISTORY OF THE YOUTH-FRIENDLY GUIDE

Apathy is Boring developed the Youth-Friendly Guide to help non-profit professionals meaningfully engage young people in shaping and directing their organizations.

The guide provides an in-depth analysis of the obstacles you will face as you work to develop intergenerational decision-making partnerships, and lays out best practices, benchmarks, and step-by-step action plans for a top-to-bottom youth infusion.

Our vision is to have young people not only being heard by decision-makers, but also becoming decision-makers whose ideas lead to positive change within Canadian society.

The first edition of the Youth-Friendly Guide was co-written by Apathy is Boring Co-Founder Ilona Dougherty at the age of 16 and several other youth as part of the Canadian Environmental Network's Youth Caucus.

This group of motivated youth went on to be founders or active leaders of the Sierra Youth Coalition, the Sierra Club of Canada, the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law at McGill University, and Apathy is Boring, among others.

A second version of the Youth-Friendly Guide was developed with the support of Health Canada in 1997, with a specific emphasis on health. A third version was developed with the support of MASC: Artists and Communities, Youth Environmental Network, and Apathy is Boring in 2004.

The Youth-Friendly Program has since expanded into being a comprehensive set of resources and services, ranging from action articles and workshops to social media consultations, Youth-Friendly audits, and, of course, this revised and expanded fourth edition of the Youth-Friendly Guide. This most recent version of the Youth-Friendly Guide was developed by Apathy is Boring staff, interns, and Board members including Patrick DeDauw, Devon LeClair, Bernard Rudny, Ilona Dougherty, Lauren Dodds, Jared Friedman, David Prodan, Caro Loutfi and Mackenzie Duncan with the support and partnership of Volunteer Canada.

WHY YOU NEED YOUTH

There are so many reasons why meaningful youth infusion in the non-profit sector is a good idea.

Demographic, economic, and cultural trends are changing and it is becoming more important than ever to integrate youth into organizations of all types. Simply put, you're going to need youth for all of these reasons and more:

To Prepare for Succession

Never before in history have so many workers been nearing retirement, and never before have they made up such a significant (and growing) proportion of the labour force. There are few new workers lining up to replace the baby-boomers.¹

In the case of non-profits, this problem of replacement of the labour force is even more present. A 2005 study in Alberta showed that 82% of NGO executives planned to leave their positions within the next few years.²

Serious turnover is on its way. It's in your best interest to start providing capacity-building experiences, leadership training, and meaningful roles to young people as soon as possible. This will give a head start to the organization you've poured so much time and energy into once you and your peers have passed your organization on to the next generation.

To Up Your Service Quality

If you're hoping to reach or provide services to youth, chances are that we know the best way to do it.

Young people negotiate youth culture daily, we have first-hand knowledge about what works to recruit us (and our friends), and we know what's missing from the youth services out there now.

Studies show that young people design better programs for youth than others do. Involving youth in program development grounds organizations more firmly in their missions and results in increased community commitment from everyone in the organization's age spectrum.

¹ Statistics Canada, "2006 Census: Portrait of the Canadian Population in 2006, by Age and Sex: National Portrait."

² Boland, Jensen, and Meyers, "Addressing the Leadership Challenge: Non-Profit Executive Directors' Views on Tenure and Transition in Alberta." 23.

To Spur Innovation

Even if youth aren't your target demographic, it's still important to stay ahead of the curve with practical innovations, both online and offline. You're going to want to tap into the energy of the young people who are shaping these tools and trends.¹ Social media and technology are second nature to youth, as are new strategies for collaborative work.

Look around your office and ask yourself what new avenues are limited by your sense of habit. Imagine the innovative solutions and alternatives that could be incorporated into your business by bringing in a young, fresh perspective to the table.

To Build Lasting Relationships

Many youth starting life outside of the family home lack social hubs and are looking for a sense of community. When you reach out to young people and their networks, you are laying groundwork for tomorrow. Simply put, youth are looking for places to belong; involve us now and we'll support you in the long-run.

Positive experiences with your organization during early adulthood years can influence the habits of future employees, supporters, voters, and policymakers in the years to come. Relationships like these sustain and replenish organizations over time. A young volunteer today will become your donor of tomorrow.

REMEMBER

Every organization needs a plan for the future. If you don't put some trust in youth now, you might have trouble finding a new Executive Director ten years down the road, you need to build your reputation and develop leaders who believe in your mission now. The investment you make in terms of preparation, guidance, and mentorship for youth pays immediate dividends, but it's also a long-term investment in the health of your organization.

³ Zeldin, Topitzes, and Calvert, "Youth in Decision-Making: a Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations." 8.

"This sharing of power is practical—it leads to better decisions, better development programs, and more sustained results."

— Gail Cockburn, Meaningful Youth Participation in International Conferences⁴

"[Young people] don't let us get away with, 'because that's the way we've always done it.'"

— Sharon Schainker of U.S. National 4-H Council⁵

"In 2011, census data showed for the first time that there were more people in the age group where people typically leave the labour force (55 to 64), than in the age group where people typically enter it (15 to 24)."

— Statistics Canada⁶

⁴ Statistics Canada, "2006 Census: Portrait of the Canadian Population in 2006, by Age and Sex: National Portrait."

⁵ Boland, Jensen, and Meyers, "Addressing the Leadership Challenge: Non-Profit Executive Directors' Views on Tenure and Transition in Alberta." 23.

⁶ Zeldin, Topitzes, and Calvert, "Youth in Decision-Making: a Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations." 8.

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH 'KIDS THESE DAYS'?

This generation is not engaging in their community the way previous generations have.

The life trajectory of past generations is gone. Youth are disengaged from traditional systems and organizations.

This means it's never been more important, or more difficult, to reach young people and bring us into your organizations. The challenge is huge, but the organizations that can reach youth, bring us in and keep us engaged will find themselves with lifelong supporters ready to carry them forward.

The signs of our disengagement from our communities can be found all over.

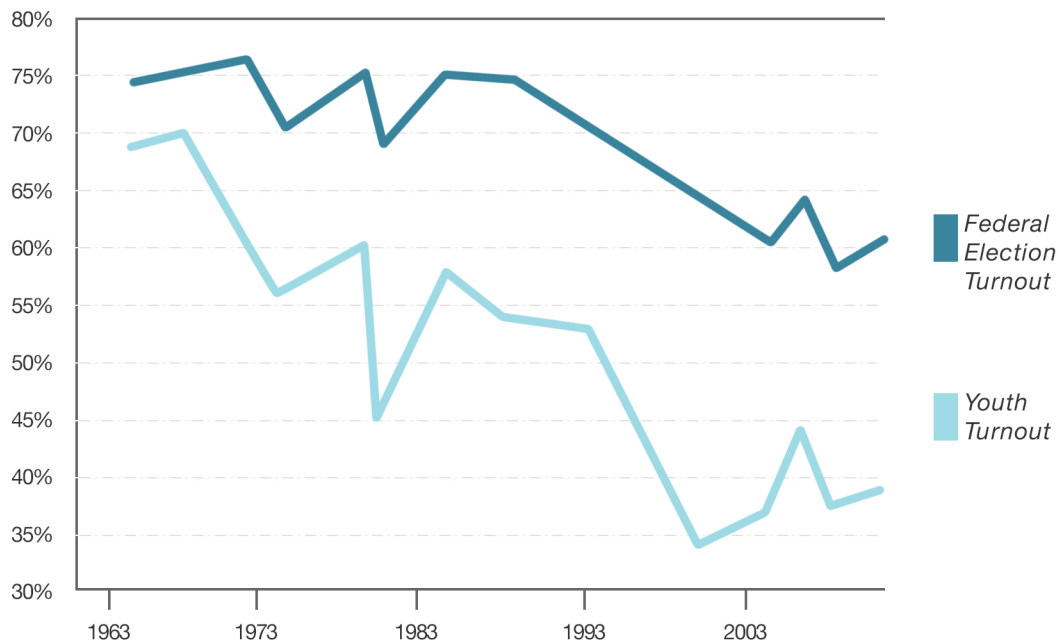
Only 58.1% of 20- to 34-year olds report a high level of "being attached to the community" down from 75.1% for youth aged 12-19.⁷

33% of 20- to 34-year olds report feeling more alone than they would like, feel less welcome in their neighbourhood and are less likely to feel they belong there than other age groups.⁸

Voting habits is another example to illustrate the decline in community engagement in this generation.

⁷ Scott, Katherine. (2010, November). Community Vitality. Waterloo, ON: Canadian Index of Wellbeing and University of Waterloo., pp. 84.

⁸ Vancouver Foundation. (2012, August). Understanding 25-34 year-olds. Retrieved from <http://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/documents/Van-Fdn-Understanding-25to34-year-olds.pdf>



Voter turnout has dropped in Canada over the past decades. In the 1960's youth voted at nearly the same rate as the older voting population. As observed in the graph, the youth vote has since dropped so steeply that it is weighing down the overall election turnout. In the 2011 federal election, youth aged 18-24 voted at a rate of 38.8% compared to 75% of the older voting population.⁹ As each new cohort of Canadians comes of age, they are less likely to vote than their predecessors. The result is that as new generations replace older ones in the electorate, the overall rate of participation declines. Youth aren't opting in anymore.

Why the disconnect?

The issue is complex, but to simplify: life for young adults just looks different these days.

Enrolment in post-secondary education is rising and we're well on our way to developing the most educated generation in history. Simultaneously, however, we're seeing a greater number of youth relocating to new towns and cities in which we have fewer roots and social ties.

Upon graduation, we're not entering into a workforce that will be kind to us. Combining the figures for youth unemployment with youth who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labour force, this group includes nearly 1 in 10 young Canadians aged 20-24.¹⁰ Even greater than this, 1 in 5 youth not working today has never held a job – a statistic that is 40% high than the long-term average.¹¹

⁹ Data collected by Elections Canada.

¹⁰ Tal, Benjamin. (2013, June). Dimensions of Youth Employment in Canada. Toronto, ON: CIBC World Markets Inc.. p. 2.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 3.

Family life for young adults these days is more likely to mean moving back in with our parents than becoming parents ourselves. The 2011 Census of Population showed that 42.3% of young adults aged 20 to 29 lived in the parental home – a major increase from 26.9% in 1981.¹² Since we're living with our parents and not our partners, it's no surprise that fewer twenty-somethings are living in couples than a generation ago.

So we have a picture of unemployed or underemployed youth who are moving back in with the parents, and delaying major life transitions like marriage and buying our own home. The result? We're really smart, but we're just not on the same path as those who came before us. We're not spreading roots and developing community ties like our parents' generation.

Apathy is Boring doesn't see this reality as bleak. We see it as an opportunity for YOU. This isn't a picture of a generation that wants nothing to do with community life, but rather a picture of generations that haven't yet figured out a new relationship given the new context.

Disconnected doesn't necessarily mean disinterested. While only 39% of us vote, 75-80% of youth claim to vote when surveyed. Their actions may not have caught up with their attitudes yet but it shows that youth feel guilty enough about not voting to lie to a total stranger.

¹² "Living arrangements of young adults aged 20 to 29." Statistics Canada. (2013, January). Government of Canada. Retrieved from http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/98-312-x2011003_3-eng.cfm

Youth are looking to belong.
We're looking for opportunities
to build community, gain skills, and
contribute to something meaningful.

REACHING OUT, BRINGING US IN

So you're bought in now – you want to engage youth in your organization. But what comes first, the outreach or the opportunities you have to offer? You need to reach out to young people to get us through the door, but you need meaningful engagement opportunities ready for us when we arrive.

In our experience working with organizations on their youth engagement initiatives, Apathy is Boring believes that sometimes 'outreach' can be a dirty word. This happens when youth outreach isn't followed up with genuine opportunities for engagement. Before you start reaching out to youth, ask yourself what you have to offer to the young people you "reach." Any youth outreach program will be far more successful if we can see that your organization is ready for us and has something valuable to offer us.

That being said, once your organization has created the spaces and structures to accommodate youth, you will need to find smart and effective ways to make them available to young people. So what comes first? Both.

What do we mean by engagement opportunity?

This might seem basic, but it's pivotal to ask yourself, "what can youth do in my organization?" The range of opportunities can be huge, from providing administrative support in your office, to planning a fundraiser or campaign, to internships, to sitting on your Board of Directors. Do not – we repeat DO NOT – reach out to youth until you have those engagement opportunities in mind. Genuine engagement should have real consequences in the way an organization operates—from vision, to budget, to on-the-ground operations.

In this section, you'll find some important facts to consider when building your youth outreach strategy, along with tips to reach a broad audience online and a guide to building trust with youth throughout the outreach process.

Reaching Youth

Reaching out to young people isn't the same as reaching out to Baby Boomers and seniors. The fact of the matter is different generations tend to have different interests, look for information in different places, and join organizations for different reasons. Here are some facts to consider when recruiting young volunteers:

- Thirty percent of young volunteers were recruited by friends.¹³ Start your initiative by hiring a few young people. Those of us who have positive experiences will talk you up to our friends and do a lot of the recruiting for you.
- Recruiting young people in groups, as well as allowing friends to volunteer together, results in more resilient volunteering commitments. By accommodating this type of "buddy system," volunteering with your organization becomes part of our social lives and something we can't imagine not doing.
- A direct, in-person request to fill specific volunteer positions is the single most successful recruitment strategy. This has been shown in study¹⁴ after study¹⁵ after study¹⁶ after study.¹⁷ Astonishingly, 45% of youth have never been asked to volunteer. Young people are approached less than any other age group.¹⁸ By simply being the organization that asks youth to volunteer, you'll be way ahead of the game.

¹³ Hientz et al., "Bridging the Gap: Enriching the Volunteer Experience to Build a Better Future for our Communities - Findings of a Pan-Canadian Research Study." 183.

¹⁴ Office of Research and Policy Development, "Reaching Our Goals: An Overview of Research in Support of the Strategic Initiatives." 5.

¹⁵ Corporation for National & Community Service, "Pathways to Service: Learning from the potential volunteer's perspective." 3.

¹⁶ Andolina et al., "Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement." 279.

¹⁷ Hientz et al., "Bridging the Gap: Enriching the Volunteer Experience to Build a Better Future for our Communities - Findings of a Pan-Canadian Research Study." 19.

¹⁸ Ibid. 20.

Online Outreach

When it comes to reaching youth, it's vital that your organization has an online outreach strategy that is carefully planned, targeted, and integrated with your organizational messaging. Online outreach alone isn't enough to bring us in (you did just read that a direct, in-person request to fill specific volunteer positions is the single most successful recruitment strategy – right?), but it is nevertheless a make or break issue.

Your organization's online presence is your face to the world. Most people, but especially youth, turn to social media first when seeking information about an organization. Your online presence therefore plays a central role in spreading the word and forming first impressions. A sloppy, ad-hoc online or social media presence can make you look out-of-touch or lacking in credibility. Trust us: there IS such a thing as bad publicity online.

In a survey of over 6,500 youth in the United States, 65% list website and 55% list social media as preferred ways to learn about non-profits.¹⁹

¹⁹ Fieldmann et al., Achieve and Johnson, Grossnickle and Associates. "The Millennial Impact Report" 2012. 5.

Here are some best practices to keep in mind:

- Make your web presence consistently branded, simple to navigate, and easy to find. Three unnecessary clicks between a young person and volunteer opportunities can spell the difference between them contacting you or another organization.
- Centralize social media profiles into one official presence for each platform. Fold together duplicate, unofficial, or rarely updated pages.
- Ensure that all of your online presences are cross-linked, so that we don't have to search for you all over again on each platform.
- Update social media with meaningful information and conversations—don't just post press releases.
- Not sure what to post? Show us your organization's people and personality. Take photos of your events, initiatives, and team as they happen—and be sure to post them in a timely manner.
- Respond to comments—even the tough ones—and foster dialogue. This not only increases your visibility in most social media feeds, but also making your organization more responsive to the public you serve.
- Less is more. If you're concerned about being able to maintain a new online presence, stick to the basics. Focus on improving your presence in the most popular channels, specifically your website.

Social media has become a crucial part of any communications strategy. Creating a full or part-time social media co-ordinator position is a great way to attract talented young people, and their work will have much more impact than simply adding these duties onto someone else's workload.

Building Trust

The biggest mistake that organizations make when trying to reach out to youth is that they expect us to care about their cause right away.

You can't expect youth to jump in head first—you have to cultivate our interest and earn our trust. Your Facebook followers today can become tomorrow's volunteers, interns, and staff – but working your way up to that takes time and effort.

Here are the steps Apathy is Boring uses to build trust with the youth we work with:

First Step:

Make a Low Risk Entry Point. Provide youth with an easy way to get involved and learn about what you do. Some call it 'slacktivism' but we call it the first step to getting involved – Facebook posts to share are super easy, low-risk opportunities to get a taste of what you're all about.

Second Step:

Let Us Get to Know You. Once young people get to see how great you are and how important your cause is, give us the chance to get to know you better. This could be at an open house at your office, or an online video. Show us your personality, and give your cause a face we can relate to.

Third Step:

Involve Us. Give us something to do. A clear effort to allow a young person to feel engaged and useful is the best next step. As youth get more comfortable with your organization, increase the level of responsibility you give us and help us align our role with our interests.

Fourth Step:

Ask Us for Advice. Find a way to ask for our feedback. Youth feel more ownership when our input is included. Whether it is helping you improve your online video, or giving you a sense of how to make your volunteer program better, make sure that youth see where our feedback is going and that it is valued.

Fifth Step:

Celebrate Our Involvement. Make sure young people you are working with are celebrated for their commitment and engagement in the cause. Don't forget to have a party, mention us on social media, or write us a personalized thank you card to show us your appreciation.

Sixth Step:

Ask Us to Share Our Experience with Our Friends. Now that you have built trust you can ask young people to reach out to our peers. This step can only come once we're attached to the organization and cause. It won't work if we aren't... but your hard work engaging us will pay off! Then, just repeat these steps with our friends.

Every time one young person walks through these steps with you, they become your most important resources for reaching out to more of us. Remember, 30% of us were recruited to volunteer by our friends. So ultimately, when it comes to outreach, youths' positive experiences are your best marketing tools.

REMEMBER

Online content and campaigns should be a path to real-world engagement. Whether they're newsletter subscribers or Facebook friends, the youth you reach online need to be given direct pathways to become involved with your organization offline, such as volunteering or attending events. Make sure that your outreach strategy provides these pathways and offers youth something of value. Think about what path a youth visiting your website for the first time would take to become a volunteer, staff member, or even Executive Director.

Think of it this way, youth don't go to parties on Facebook, they go on Facebook to find out about parties with their real friends happening in real life. Your social media presence and website have to lead to offline opportunities for engagement just like Facebook does.



THE FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH-FRIENDLY PRACTICES

So, you're ready to reach out. You have engagement opportunities ready to be filled. You're going to build trust so fast we won't even know what hit us!

But when youth start working with youth, how do you effectively work with us?

If you're not sure how working with youth differs from working with adults, you've landed on the right page. Apathy is Boring's Five Principles for youth-friendliness provide a solid foundation for developing a youth-friendly philosophy and policy that suit the needs of youth and fit the realities of your organizational culture.

The five principles for youth-friendly practice include:

1. Set out Clear Expectations and Honest Limitations

- For an organization to truly engage youth, our voices must be included from the start of any project, our participation must be clearly recognized, and the work we do must be attributed to us.
- It's important to be clear about who makes which decisions, when and how they will be made, and what the expectations and limits are of the actions being planned.
- Be honest and realistic with youth (and yourself) about time and resources that the organization has available to engage youth.
- Youth need realistic timelines and clearly defined responsibilities so that we know what is expected from us. This should include proper lead-time, space for reflection, and time for trial and error.
- Youth should be provided with written orientation materials at the beginning of any project.

2. Encourage Creativity and Difference

- When setting up partnerships with youth, organizations need to take into account the reality of youth cultures and lifestyles.
- Youth need access to role models who encourage creativity and individuality.

- Remember that young people, regardless of our appearance or personal style, need to be respected for our abilities, our knowledge, and the diversity we bring to the process.
- It is crucial to empower youth to speak out when we encounter discrimination within the organization.
- Organizations must ensure that there are effective mechanisms in place to deal with concerns or difficulties young people or adults may have, and that all adults have been briefed about and have bought into Youth-Friendly practices.

3. Make Connections Between Generations

- Partnerships work best when connections are made between different generations who have parallel experiences, interests, resources, and networks to share.
- It is important for youth to be able to work with, learn from, and share with people our own age and those older and younger than us. It is equally important for adults to believe that they can also learn from youth.
- Make specific spaces for soliciting youth perspectives, and don't just rely on "opening up the floor."
- Once youth and adults are engaged in a true partnership, understanding and empathy develops.
- Youth and adults have different skills to bring to the table, and it is important that the two recognize these assets in each other.

4. Provide Mentorship and Support

- Mentorship helps ensure constant and effective communication between all those involved in an organization.
- Mentors should be people who are experienced in their field and are trusted or chosen by youth.

- Mentors don't always have to be adults. Allow space for co-operative relationships to develop between youth with different levels of experience.
- Remember that youth often have other commitments and are not always able to participate in projects because of personal, academic, or financial constraints. Flexibility is key.
- Ensure that support—financial and otherwise—is available to assist youth in all aspects of decision making.

5. Communicate Openly and Follow Up

- Good communication means being patient and listening to all of what someone has to say, even if you don't agree.
- It also means making sure there is space for youth to ask questions and voice concerns.
- Good communication requires reaching youth through channels that are familiar to them. Making information accessible online via social media, email and a well-organized website are necessary to reach out to youth and keep us informed. Keep in mind, however, that even the best digital strategy can't replace the personal connections that come from face-to-face dialogue.
- Youth must feel that our opinions and contributions count. That means actively listening to us, treating us as equals, and allowing our ideas and suggestions to lead to action.
- Good communication also includes following up after the fact. This helps everyone understand the link between input and outcomes.
- Make sure that youth know where our input has been used and what will happen next.
- Youth-Friendly organizations always ask youth what we got out of an experience and celebrate success together.

We all have needs.
To stay involved in any cause, youth need:

MEANING

To be doing something that matters;

CONTROL

To make real decisions, and actually be heard;

CONNECTEDNESS

To be part of a community.

WHAT BEING YOUTH-FRIENDLY LOOKS LIKE

What happens when the shift to youth-friendliness starts? Positive improvements—both expected and unexpected—reverberate throughout your organization. Here are some opportunities to consider and prepare for.

Decision Making is Shared and Improved

Organizations are increasingly exploring different decision-making models that improve buy-in and reduce pressure on individual leaders.²⁰ Youth are leading the charge in demanding models that include dividing leadership roles into multiple directorships, flattening and reworking chains of command, and allowing space for everyone to propose innovative changes. These models have simply led to better, more holistic decision-making, outperforming their most experienced member alone 97% of the time.²¹

A Spirit of Collaboration Emerges

Enabling the use of collaborative technologies favoured by this generation, such as wikis, open-source software, and social media, fosters an environment of innovation and teamwork that sparks lateral thinking and creative solutions.²² Youth's familiarity with these technologies is a skillset and strength of our generation and leveraging this will help your organization break out of traditional silos and plug in to emerging trends²³ at the speed necessary to keep up in today's world.

Knowledge Gaps Close

Coordinating the ongoing training required to orient youth and give them a full picture of the organization can actually close knowledge gaps in your organization that you didn't even know were there, whether on your board or even among management.²⁴ It's rare that everyone is on the same page in any organizational structure, and nothing helps identify a blind spot like having to explain it to someone new, and developing an organization where learning is a constant state of being.

²⁰ Blanchet-Cohen, Mack, and Cook, "Changing the Landscape: Involving Youth in Social Change." 27.

²¹ Michaelsen, Watson, and Black, "A Realistic Test of Individual Versus Group Consensus Decision Making."

²² Isakson, "Millennial Engagement: Bringing the Next Generation into Your Organization."

²³ O'Rourke, Vital Signs, "#GenerationFlux: Understanding the seismic shifts that are shaking Canada's youth." 9.

²⁴ Illkiw, Violetta, telephone interview, July 7, 2011.

Accountability Increases

Young people expect tangible results towards the fulfilment of your organization's mission. This fresh, exacting perspective enhances commitment and accountability where habit and precedent may have been supporting ineffective practices.²⁵ The overall sense of shared accountability in an organization is enhanced when you enable youth to fill decision-making roles with real responsibilities, provide us with the necessary support, and allow us to make the best possible use of our skills.²⁶

Risks get Taken

Youth engagement involves budgeting more resources and making room for learning as well as trial and error. As a result, your organization's decision-making can become bolder and more adaptive. Becoming Youth-Friendly inevitably improves an organization's ability to implement new approaches and leave room to spur innovation.

Engagement Increases for Everyone

The same efforts you undertake to increase youth engagement will actually lead to overall increased engagement across generations in your workforce and volunteer base. Like we say, being Youth-Friendly is really being people-friendly. Studies show that effectively enabling workers with the necessary support, resources, and tools they need, and creating energizing work environments will increase overall engagement – with clear bottom-line effects.²⁷

²⁵ Blanchet-Cohen, Mack, and Cook, "Changing the Landscape: Involving Youth in Social Change." 72.

²⁶ Towers Watson, "2012 Global Workforce Study." 15.

²⁷ Towers Watson, "2012 Global Workforce Study." 4.

Santropol Roulant, founded in 1995, is a thriving meals-on-wheels organization in Montreal's Plateau district that delivers healthy, inexpensive meals by bicycle to the elderly and people with limited autonomy.

With a membership uniting youth and seniors at their general meetings, regular brunches, and thanks to their fundamentally intergenerational board, the Roulant has become a vibrant, enduring cornerstone of the Montreal community.

The team of the Santropol Roulant has developed and implemented a rooftop urban garden, kitchen and bicycle workshop programming, and integrated sustainability initiatives—all on top of the Roulant's core services.

Santropol Roulant's volunteer team, numbering over 200 and predominantly including short-term students, is dynamic and self-replenishing. The deep involvement of young people and the creation of new ideas through organization's intergenerational partnerships have been central to this accomplishment.

All of all this has been done with a dozen staff members. The difference at the Roulant is a serious commitment to intergenerational dialogue and full partnerships for young people in decision-making, from frontline service providers to its board of directors.²⁸

²⁸ Nilsson, "The Southern Wall: The Art of Engagement at Santropol Roulant."

WHY ISN'T THIS HAPPENING ALREADY?

If it's such a no-brainer, why don't more organizations integrate young people's vitality and creativity into the upper levels of their decision-making?

The answer boils down to a reluctance or an uncertainty around how to tackle ageism. Some adult attitudes just aren't helping the situation.

Identifying and understanding ageism is the first step to overcoming it and it sounds more intimidating than it is. This kind of reflection and self-evaluation contributes to more dynamic and responsive organizational management.

““The young ...are too lazy to do anything about it. Most of the under-25s don't even bother to vote. Instead of fighting for change, they wallow in their vanities and entitlements.”

— Lawrence Martin, *The Globe and Mail*

Stop and ask yourself, is your organization working for youth or with youth? A mindset that pictures youth as clients to be served, or problems to be solved, shuts us out of helping shape the services that are supposed to meet our needs.

It's vital to undertake work with youth with an open mind and to give each young person the opportunity to achieve what we can achieve without facing unfair and unfounded judgment.

Whether young people are perceived as lazy, disloyal, naïve, or even incompetent, these stereotypes are surprisingly well-established. Challenging your own preconceptions about young people is going to take some time, some real talk, and a willingness to realize you may have been wrong. However, it is completely feasible with real commitment and reflection.

Ageism distorts organizational thinking. An American study presented news stories with positive statistics about the views, aspirations, and habits of young people to six focus groups of adults. All of the groups clung to ageist stereotypes, and unanimously dismissed the positive statistics as false—even after being informed by the researchers that the statistics were true! This is exactly the kind of fact-free decision-making processes unaddressed ageism allows. It's time for your organization to break free.²⁹

Overcoming ageism takes effort, reflection, and re-working some of your organizational practices. Here are some tips that, while won't fix it all, will give you a place to start:

Avoid devaluating statements like:

'You are so smart for 15!'

'We know what is best for you.'

'My daughter/son/hamster is your age.'

Build youths' skills. When young people aren't given the opportunities to learn and are parachuted into a role, our slip-ups aren't proof of ageist stereotypes: they're actually the result of ageist practice that kept young people from developing the right skills in the first place.

Rework organizational norms to avoid exclusionary practices. Little steps like holding meetings at times and locations that work for youth and acknowledging youths' financial constraints to participation by offering transportation or food are great starts.

²⁹ Gilliam and Bales, "Strategic Frame Analysis: Reframing America's Youth." 8.

"Negative stereotypes toward youth will continue to remain if organizations are not properly training youth for decision-making roles. Nothing changes an adult's opinion quicker than a young person who is properly prepared. Nothing reinforces a stereotype quicker than experiences that substantiate already-held beliefs. It is the organization's fault if adults are allowed to maintain their stereotypes because the youth selected are not trained. Too many organizations value youth participation over properly prepared youth participation."

— Harmonie Mason and Richard Goll of the Hampton Coalition for Youth.³⁰

³⁰ Zeldin, Topitzes, and Calvert, "Youth in Decision-Making: a Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations." 50.

Following its tremendously positive experiences with The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation's YouthScape program, The United Way of Thunder Bay has made real youth presence in decision making a fundamental component of its community service.

Today, they have a youth-led selection committee that allocates multiple grants as large as \$10,000 to other youth-led initiatives in the community.³¹ Taking the first steps toward youth engagement with the support of the McConnell Foundation was crucial. Direct contact with youth gave the United Way of Thunder Bay an appreciation of young people's capacities and drive. This built confidence and resolve within the organization to keep developing and consolidating youth leadership initiatives.³²

This kind of first-hand exposure is by far the most powerful means of overcoming misconceptions about youth and building an organizational will for change. The United Way of Thunder Bay's willingness to make the first crucial steps has led them not only to integrate youth in their own work, but also to become energetic advocates for youth leadership in all organizations. It's not only nice—it works!

³¹ United Way of Thunder Bay, "Youth 4 Community Funding."

³² Youth Scape, "Youth Scape - Home."

- CONCLUSION -

Youth engagement can sometimes seem intimidating, but it has become clear that the social sector must fully integrate the next generation of changemakers if it intends to survive and thrive in the long term.

Becoming youth-friendly is going to require buy-in from frontline staff, supervisors, management, and the board of directors. You will have to be serious about challenging ageism and reworking your organizational practices. You will have to comprehensively evaluate your organizational culture to develop a specific vision of how young people will fit in.

This change will take time, patience, and ongoing commitment to see it through to fruition. Youth engagement is always a process an organization undergoes, not a short-term project it checks off the list.

With appropriate support, preparation, and planning, these initiatives can revolutionize the way you work. They help sharpen an organization's service delivery and prepare it for the new demographic landscape that is developing.

An engagement program launched early and with adequate resources can ease difficult transitions and promote a culture of ongoing learning and adaptation within your workplace. You'll be providing us with spaces we want to be involved in, and helping us make a difference in ways that matter to us.

REMEMBER

You aren't alone in working toward this. A number of organizations have sprung up to respond to this exact need and offer services to help plan, implement, and evaluate meaningful youth engagement initiatives. Take advantage of these services and get in touch with these organizations today.

Apathy is Boring is committed to seeing young people become decision-makers in the social sector, and that's why we've continued to build our Youth-Friendly Program. We have plenty of experience doing this, and we offer proven services and resources to ease the process, so don't hesitate to contact us.

Youth engagement is a necessity that can't be ignored. The longer you wait to make the leap, the more difficult it will be to do so gracefully (or at all). Start having these conversations now, and your organization will be able to make room for a new generation of supporters. We guarantee you'll be glad you did.

This guide could not have been produced without the efforts and assistance of many people.

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Developed in partnership with:



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APATHYISBORING
L'APATHIEC'ESTPLATE

ABOUT APATHY IS BORING

Apathy is Boring was founded in 2004, when a choreographer, a filmmaker, and a fashion photographer met at a party. Troubled by how few of their friends were actively participating in Canada's democracy, they started an online campaign to mobilize youth to vote during the 2004 federal election.

Apathy is Boring has since grown into a leading national, non-partisan, youth-led charitable organization that uses art and technology to educate youth about democracy, with the aim of increasing youth voter turnout, increasing youth engagement in the democratic process, and building a sustainable dialogue between youth and elected officials.

Apathy is Boring has distinguished itself as a credible leader by reaching millions of young Canadians since 2004 and working with partners as diverse as Elections Canada, Office of the Secretary to the Governor General, MTV/MuchMusic, Dose.ca, and many more to engage youth across Canada.

Our Programs

Voting: We increase youth voter turnout through mobilization campaigns during federal, provincial, and municipal elections as well as conduct research projects focused on improving youth mobilization tactics.

Getting Involved: We encourage youth to get involved in the democratic process and create opportunities for dialogue with decision-makers through apathyisBoring.com, and workshops, street teams, and live events offline.

Youth Friendly: We give civil society and government the concrete tools they need to engage youth in decision-making through workshops, organizational audits, and other 'Youth Friendly' services and resources.

Our Philosophy

Youth as Decision-Makers: We believe that creating spaces for dialogue and decision-making opportunities for youth are critical to youth engagement in democracy.

Impact: We believe in solving the problem of declining youth engagement in democracy, not just raising awareness about it.

Reaching the Unengaged: We believe in doing the hard work to reach and activate unengaged youth.

Intergenerational Partnerships: We believe in the importance and value of intergenerational partnerships.

Low risk entry points: We believe in going to where young people are and not expecting young people to come to us, and that sometimes taking the first step towards civic engagement is the most important one.

Provide information and choices: We believe in providing information in an accessible way to educate and inform young people. We don't believe in preaching.

Our Methodology

All of our programming goes through a three-part innovation cycle:

Gather Knowledge: Every activity undertaken by Apathy is Boring begins with a discussion of the research that we need to do.

Experiment and Innovate: Apathy is Boring is not afraid to experiment and innovate.

Maximize Impact: Apathy is Boring is a social innovator in the field of youth engagement. When we have the capacity to do so, we expand the reach of our own programs. Otherwise, we give our ideas away. By doing so, Apathy is Boring can affect far more youth than any one organization could ever reach directly.

FURTHER READING

We've found these guides tremendously helpful for those who want to learn more about youth engagement. Most of these resources are available free of cost online.

Barriers to Building Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships

(Kent Klindera et al., *Transitions Journal*, 2001)

Analysis of the barriers youth face in organizational work, coupled with practical ways to get around them.

Bridging the Gap: Enriching the Volunteer Experience to Build a Better Future for our Communities

(Melanie Hientz et al., *Volunteer Canada*, 2010)

In-depth study of different segments of the Canadian volunteering population, with a particular focus on what makes young volunteers want to stick around.

Building Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships

(Jane Norman, *Transitions Journal*, 2001)

Outline of the concept of youth-adult partnerships, crucial to meaningful youth engagement.

Cap sur les jeunes bénévoles: tracez votre chemin.

(Marine Sériès, *Réseau de l'Action Bénévole du Québec*, 2011)

(French only) Step-by-step analysis, with reflection tools and follow-up benchmarks to tailor your youth-engagement initiative to the realities of your organization.

Changing the Landscape: Involving Youth in Social Change

(Natasha Blanchet-Cohen et al., *International Institute for Child Rights and Development*, 2010)

Tips and reflections coming out of on-the-ground experiences in a variety of nation-wide youth engagement initiatives, large and small, as part of the J.W. McConnell Foundation's YouthScape program.

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring

(MENTOR, 2009)

More resources for tailoring your mentorship programs to suit the needs of your organization.

#GenerationFlux: Understanding the seismic shifts that are shaking Canada's youth

(Dominique O'Rourke, *Accolade Communications for Community Foundations of Canada*, 2012)

A collection and synthesis of disparate research from across Canada to provide a more complete picture of Canada's young people that provides a rich background to understanding the shifting economic, demographic and social landscapes for today's youth.

GroundFloors: Building Youth Organizing Platforms

(Chris Kang et al., Laidlaw Foundation, 2011)

Introduction to the practice of established non-profits supporting youth-led initiatives by providing organizing platforms and other forms of support.

Mentorship Pilot Project Report

(Canadian Environmental Network's Youth Caucus, RCEN, 2010)

Example of self-evaluation of a mentorship program by the Canadian Environmental Network.

Millennial Engagement: Bringing the Next Generation into Your Organization

(Trina Isakson, Charity Village, 2011)

Insights into the mindset of Millennial professionals, particularly with regards to collaborative new working styles.

The Millennial Impact Report 2012

(Derrick Fieldmann et al., Achieve and Johnson, Grossnickle and Associates, 2012)

Research report created to obtain an understanding of successful strategies and programs for engaging Millennials from nonprofit professionals' perspectives.

Online Politics 101: The Tools and Tactics of Online Political Advocacy

(Colin Delaney, 2011)

Guide from the United States for using social media to develop a base for political and social action. Relevant for reaching youth and for any organization.

The Road to Retention: Youth Perspectives on Transforming Organizations into Choice Employers (Vinod Rajasekaran, Public Policy Forum, 2010)

A report with recommendations from focus groups of young professionals on what makes them feel like staying in a certain workplace for a long time.

Volunteer Connections: New Strategies for Engaging Youth

(Volunteer Canada, 2001)

Guide by Volunteer Canada on reaching, engaging, and retaining young volunteers.

Young People in Governance

(Rebecca Molyneux et al., nfp Synergy, 2010)

Analysis and tips out of the UK targeted at involving youth directly in organizational governance.

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