

Youth Friendly Guide

5TH GENERATION



2021

“You do have power and you can make change... I hope other young people will realize that they [too] have power”

Apathy is Boring Youth Ambassador, Toronto





How to be Youth Friendly

As youth experts (and youth ourselves), we know the power and value of activating youth in our work. Across all sectors, we depend heavily on the innovation, creativity, and ingenuity of the next generation to not only enliven our work, but to shape and define the world of tomorrow.

This is a tall order, made especially difficult as young people are inheriting an increasingly unstable world. On a global scale, young people are three times as likely as adults (25 years and older) to be unemployed.¹ Worldwide, mental health problems now affect an estimated 700 million people² and the World Bank predicts that by 2050, 140 million people may become displaced by the effects of climate change.³

Despite this, young people continue to inspire, lead, and organize social movements that call into question the systemic inequalities coursing through our communities and institutions. Young activists across the globe are boosting the climate movement,⁴ while Black youth organizing has helped build what may be the largest protest movement in U.S. history⁵. An investment in youth, and the change we stand for, is a direct investment towards a brighter, cleaner, and more equitable future.

But what does “investing in youth” truly look like? From our experience working with young people over the last 16 years, it looks like providing meaningful opportunities for leadership development. It looks like giving youth the agency and freedom to make impactful decisions. It looks like sincerely supporting youth at the onset of their careers, without tokenizing them for visibility's sake.

However, it's imperative to remember that youth are not a monolithic entity, quite the opposite. Young people are diverse, unique, and have distinct needs based on the conditions of their lived experiences. Youth hold multiple social identities, some examples being their race, gender, sexuality, class, and immigration status. These intersecting identities shape their experiences, as well as their ability to access education, resources, and opportunities. Youth who are members of numerous minority groups are not only marginalized from one affiliation, but can feel discounted by more than one identity simultaneously.⁶

The knowledge in this guide should serve as a jumping off point to better understand young people today, their needs, and what drives them, but it's important to not take a “one size fits all” approach. Remember that youth with intersectional identities face unique challenges that will affect how easily we can access your work.

¹ International Labour Organization (2020), Global Employment Trends for Youth, 2020. Online.

² World Economic Forum (2019). The Global Risks Report, 2019, 14th Edition. Online.

³ International Monetary Fund (2019). The Economics of Climate. Online.

⁴ United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change. [n.d.] Youth in action on climate change: inspirations from around the world. Online.

⁵ Gershon, L.(2020). A Century of Black Youth Activism. Online.

⁶ Saher, F. (2016) “Intersectionality in Programs and Services for Newcomer Youth in Toronto.” Major Research Paper, Ryerson University. Online.

Throughout this guide, we'll explore why youth are an invaluable asset to your organization, and how to structure your work to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship. In a 2017 report, "13 ways to Modernize Youth Employment in Canada", the expert panel on youth employment noted:

"As the Canadian economy becomes more knowledge-based and demands greater innovation and creativity, the business case for hiring young people grows stronger. Young people are uniquely equipped to help employers handle the pace of change in this new world of work. The value of youth is a strategic business discussion that must be held in every boardroom across the country."

Furthermore, as millennials are projected to become 75% of the global workforce by 2025, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and resources they will need to make important decisions is vital to preparing for the future.⁷ Young people will be contributing to Canada's financial and social safety net for decades to come, as the nature of labour continues to evolve.

Whether you're hoping to reach youth as staff, clients, volunteers, supporters, donors, board members, or maybe even your next Executive Director or CEO, you're going to need a comprehensive and targeted strategy to reach, engage, and retain young people. The foresight to invest in a new generation of innovative, creative, and ambitious supporters today is crucial to your organization's viability in the future.

It's time to start these conversations, and work towards meaningfully empowering youth in our work. When we support and engage young people to lead, we indirectly contribute to our communities, our systems, and ultimately, our democracy. By creating spaces where we feel we can drive change forward, youth increase their confidence and sense of power, build their networks, and shift their attitudes towards civic engagement.



⁷Deloitte. (2014). Big Demands and high expectations: The Deloitte Millennial Survey. Online.



Introducing the Youth Friendly Guide

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 you need to stay vibrant for many years to come while making youth feel important, valued, and engaged in your work. This Guide is designed to support YOU as you reach out to and engage young people aged 18-35 in decision-making.

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.

Drawing on an extensive analysis of ethnography, developmental psychology, volunteer management research, and years of experience working with youth, Apathy is Boring has developed our Youth-Friendly program to address the needs of organizations big and small and across different sectors.

Inside, you'll find everything you need to know about today's youth and how to help them thrive. Understanding youth, where we come from, and the barriers we face is the first step towards meaningful collaboration.

Part 1 of this Guide will discuss the Why's of being Youth Friendly: why you need youth, why there's a disconnect, and address why youth engagement isn't already happening across all sectors. Part 2 will do a deep dive on reaching out and bringing youth in, discuss the Seven Recommendations for Youth Engagement, and explore what being Youth Friendly really looks like (with real life case studies and examples!).

Throughout this guide, we'll share our best tips for reaching out and engaging youth whether it's online or offline. Engagement goes far beyond likes, clicks, and followers. We'll discuss how we turn clicks into significant IRL support.

This guide goes beyond diversity initiatives and ticking boxes off for inclusion. This guide is about recognizing the pressing challenges that organizations face, and understanding how building relationships with youth can directly address these challenges.

More servings?

Apathy is Boring's Youth-Friendly program features tailored services for all your youth engagement needs, including⁸:

- + Online resources
- + Customizable Presentations
- + Half-Day Workshops
- + One-day Brainstorms
- + Youth-Friendly Audits
- + Implementation help

⁸ For more information, check out our website: www.youthfriendly.com

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Why you need youth

There are so many reasons why meaningful youth engagement in all sectors is a good idea.

Demographic, economic, and cultural trends are changing, as is the nature of work. It is becoming more important than ever to involve youth into organizations of all types.

When involving youth at every level of decision-making, you're acknowledging that positionality is an important area to consider as a mechanism for change. By creating spaces where youth can lead, you're providing young people with an opportunity to tap into inherent skills, and allowing them to then take the acquired knowledge and changemaking confidence back to their communities, and trickle down into their civic engagement with our democratic systems.

You're going to need to prioritize youth involvement in your work and practices for all of these reasons, and more:

TO SPUR INNOVATION

Having worked alongside young Canadians since 2004, we know that organizations who can successfully leverage the innovative capabilities of youth are better situated to navigate change, and rapidly pivot when faced with challenges. There's a general consensus amongst economists, policy makers, and business leaders that our sustained economic health is based on our ability to create more innovation.⁹

Therefore, when considering how to become resilient, yet malleable in an increasingly tech-driven environment, it's never been a better time to invest in youth. In emerging adulthood, creative thinking is at its neurobiological peak, in addition to superior memory abilities.¹⁰ Young workers are energetic, flexible, and as digital natives, we are well positioned to expertly navigate social media and technology, and can offer fresh perspectives about collaborative work.

We cannot understate the value of young people's superior problem-solving skills. More than older generations, young people are willing to experiment, take risks and challenge the status quo. Because of their innovation potential, when young people are meaningfully engaged, we are primed to tackle the many logistical or operational challenges your work may face. This innovation can be utilized beyond your work. By creating these spaces to allow for innovation, young people will feel confident and valued, activating them to participate in the ways we want to participate.¹¹ Beyond work, young people will contribute their strengths and capacity towards building our democracy as a whole.

TO UP YOUR SERVICE QUALITY

If you're hoping to reach or provide services to youth, we know the best way to do it. As a youth-led organization, we have first-hand knowledge on what works to recruit us and our peers. We know what's missing from different sectors. We

⁹ Dougherty, I. & Clarke, A. (2018) Wired for Innovation: Valuing the unique innovation abilities of emerging adults. *Emerging Adulthood* (9)

¹⁰ Dougherty, I. & Clarke, A. (2018) Wired for Innovation: Valuing the unique innovation abilities of emerging adults. *Emerging Adulthood* (11)

¹¹ Mahoney, T., Reusch, S., and Loufi, C. (2020). Together We Rise. Online.

also know that hiring youth is a great way to enhance the quality of your services, improving your relationship with employers, donors, supporters, and clients.

By meaningfully involving young people, your organization has the opportunity to leverage the innovative strengths and skill sets we described. Youth’s familiarity with programming language, collaborative technologies and social media, fosters an environment of growth and creative decision-making. Recruiting youth can help institutions break from unnecessary traditions, and create an agile environment that’s able to adapt to rapid change.

When institutions encourage this involvement, young people are empowered to bring their ideas to life; which develops confidence and a sense of power in their own abilities. Activating young people through these avenues encourages them to look for ways that we can further contribute to their larger communities, and to democracy as a whole.¹²

By involving youth in program development, you’re creating opportunities for young people to apply their unique skills, networks and creativity toward undertaking projects of their own design, while also improving the quality of your work.¹³ By hiring youth, you can gain tangible benefits by capturing their talents and ideas.¹⁴

TO BUILD LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

2016 Statistics Canada data reports that there are 6.8 million young people, aged 15 to 29, living in Canada¹⁵. This number rises to 9.3 million when including youth aged 30 to 34. This is a huge demographic that will have enormous influence on our economy in the next 10-15 years. Positive

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

REMEMBER

Every organization needs a plan for the future. You need to build your reputation with youth, nurture and develop their innovative capabilities, 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, our communities, and our democracy.

“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

“Innovation requires different perspectives. We need to nurture that in youth, and a lot of youth already have it, but just give them the space.”

— **Habon Ali**,
Apathy is Boring Board Member

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

— **13 Ways to Modernize Youth Employment in Canada**¹⁶

¹² Mahoney, T., Reusch, S., and Loufi, C. (2020). Together We Rise. Online.

¹³ Youth Lead Democratic Innovation

¹⁴ Wolf Dittkoff, S and Seldon, W. (2015). “Why - and how - to hire Young People without Diplomas.” Harvard Business Review. Online.

¹⁵ Canadian Labour Congress. (2016). Diverse, Engaged, and Precariously Employed: An In-depth look at Young Workers in Canada. Online.

¹⁶ Government of Canada. (modified 2017). 13 Ways to Modernize Youth Employment in Canada. Online.



What's going on with 'kids these days'?

"I know what community looks like and I know what a lack of community looks like, but I don't know how to bridge that gap."

— Apathy is Boring VOTE Volunteer, 2019

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN CANADA IS CHANGING.

As our world gradually changes, youth are increasingly gravitating towards community based, non-institutional, and social movement oriented forms of engagement that blur the line between private and public space.¹⁷ The life trajectory of past generations is gone, and youth are becoming increasingly disengaged from traditional systems and organizations. In other words, youth are less likely than our parents to participate in traditional models of democratic engagement like voting. Instead, we are finding their own ways to participate in their communities where we can identify democratic frameworks that include them.

This means it's never been more important, or more difficult, to reach young people and bring us into your work. The challenge is huge, but the communities 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 (AND IT'S NOT JUST IN YOUTH).

In 2016, for the first time, one-person households became the most common type of household in Canada, surpassing couples with children.¹⁸

When asked about their community ties, only 14% of Canadians described the current state of their social lives as "very good." 35% of Canadians say they are often or "always" alone.¹⁹

40% of Canadian millennials, and 34% of Canadian Gen Z's, described their connection to their local communities as "weak." We're seeing a greater number of youth relocating to new towns and cities in which we have fewer roots and social ties.

IN THIS GUIDE, WE DEFINE CANADA'S YOUNGER GENERATIONS AS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18-35 YEARS OLD.

Gen Z: born between 1997-2012. We're talking specifically about older Gen-Z youth between the ages of 18-24

Millennials: born between 1980-1996. These are young people between the ages of 25 to 40, in this guide we're talking about Millennials up to 35 years old.

¹⁷ Youth Lead Democratic Innovation- Page 2

¹⁸ Statistics Canada (2019). Study: Living alone in Canada. Online.

¹⁹ Angus Reid Institute (2019). A Portrait of Social Isolation and Loneliness in Canada Today. Online.

Anecdotally, from working extensively with youth, we've heard again and again that there is an absence of community when it comes to collectively engaging in volunteer work. Creating networks where youth can build, explore, and take action together can lead to an entire movement of young people who are ready and able to support your mission. As one of our volunteers noted:

It's about creating a network where you're not feeling like, "I'm interested in this thing, I want to voice my opinion on this, but I don't know how to do it and I'm alone."

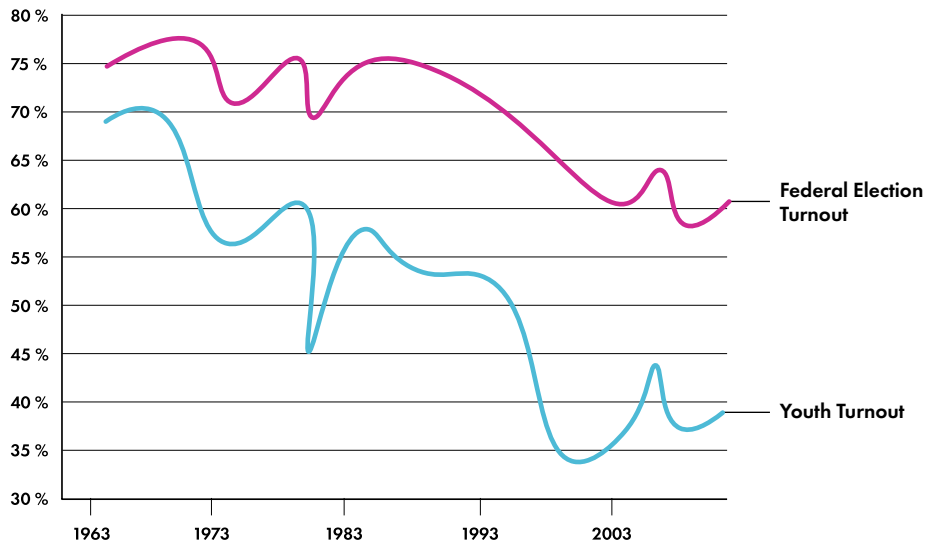
— Apathy is Boring VOTE Volunteer

EXAMPLE: YOUTH DISENGAGEMENT IN VOTING

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

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

In the 2015 election, although the youth voter turnout increased to 57.2%²⁰, it remained below the national average of 66.1%. In 2019, 54% of 18-24 year olds voted in the polls that year. Harrell and Gosselin state that the 2015 election garnered more interest among young people, and that mobilization efforts and messages specific to youth contributed to youth interest.²¹ Apathy is Boring and other youth mobilizing organizations did its largest get-out-the-vote campaign in 2019. It is unclear if the trends are beginning to reverse, but either way, it does show that we need to continue supporting youth mobilizing to the polls to ensure long term democratic viability.



²⁰ Library of Canada (2016). Youth Voter Turnout in Canada Today. Online.

²¹ Harrell and Gosselin (2015). "The Youth Vote in the 2015 Election". Canadian Election Analysis: Communication, Strategy, and Democracy. Online.



Why the disconnect?

“Good leadership is so important in guiding youth who feel less empowered to make a change. It involves a diversified understanding of the complexities happening in our current state.”

— RISE Ambassador, 2020

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

YOUNG CANADIANS FEEL DISCONNECTED FROM THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PROCESS AND FROM TRADITIONAL MODES OF PARTICIPATION.

In terms of civic and political participation, the norms and values of youth are changing rather than declining²². Traditional narratives of youth disengagement treat a withdrawal from major institutions (i.e. elections, political parties) as a sign of apathy or lack of education, when these trends may actually reflect a shift in young people’s ways of engaging with politics.

For scholar Lance Bennett (2008), younger generations are moving towards “self-actualizing citizenship”. For them, politics is seen as a much more broader set of concerns from identity politics to community organizing. It is often motivated by a sense of individual purpose and personal expression rather than obligation to government²³.

Young people’s participation is shifting as we deliberately choose to swap forms of participation that we see as deeply flawed for community-based, non-institutional and social movement-oriented forms of engagement that blur the line between private and public space. Often created by young people themselves, these new constructs exploit their familiarity with the power and reach of new media technologies.

YOUNG CANADIANS FACE CHALLENGES IN ENTERING THE WORKFORCE AND WANT DIFFERENT THINGS FROM THEIR JOBS COMPARED TO OLDER GENERATIONS.

Youth are living in an age of disruption, with projections that 25% of Canadian jobs will be heavily impacted by technology in the coming decade.²⁴ Fully half of Canadian jobs will go through a significant overhaul of the skills required.²⁵ As for the skills themselves, they too are shifting. Employers are increasingly looking for foundational skills such as critical thinking, coordination, social perceptiveness, active listening and complex problem solving²⁶.

²² Mahoney, T., Reusch, S., and Loufi, C. (2020). Together We Rise. Online.

²³ Bennet, W.L. (2008). Changing citizenship in the Digital Age. Civic Life Online: Learning how digital media can engage youth, 1, 1-24.

²⁴ RBC Future Skills. (2018). Humans Wanted: how Canadian Youth can thrive in the age of Disruption. Online.

²⁵ RBC Future Skills. (2018). Humans Wanted: how Canadian Youth can thrive in the age of Disruption. Online.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

In many cases, higher education alone is no longer sufficient for entry into the job market (Lamb & Doyle, 2017). Increasingly, youth are required to demonstrate work experience and soft skills in addition to academic or training qualifications in order to even be eligible for entry-level positions in their respective fields (Lamb & Doyle, 2017).

The job market is also changing. Older generations are retiring much later. Over the last 20 years, Canada has seen a near doubling of the workforce participation rates of those over 60 moving from 14% in 1997 to 26% in 2017²⁸. As for young people, employment rates of youth aged 15 to 24 fell from 57.2% in 2006 to 51.9% in 2016²⁹. This changing workforce lays a number of difficulties with regards to the renewal of the labour force, knowledge transfer and job retention making job hunting challenging for young people entering the job market³⁰.

YOUNG CANADIANS OF BIPOC AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES FACE DIFFERENT/GREATER BARRIERS.

Often youth are taken as a monolithic group. However, a deeper understanding of positionality allows one to see that youth’s lived experience impacts in many ways their ability to engage. As one of our RISE ambassador’s said: «It’s important to acknowledge societal institutions that hinder different groups to attain equal opportunities».

Scholar Naomi Nichols notes that some youth grow up with plenty of economic resources, a safe place to live, enough healthy food to eat and many opportunities for development. She remarks that «in many instances, these are also youth whose cultural ways of knowing and being are reflected in – and rewarded by – our dominant institutions.» In contrast, she emphasizes that other youth grow up experiencing discrimination, with little security and opportunities highlighting that «these youth experience multiple and compounding disadvantages that influence how they grow and develop.»³¹



²⁸ Statistics Canada. (modified 2018). Reasons for working at 60 and beyond. Online.

²⁹ Canadian Labour Congress. (2016). Diverse, Engaged, and Precariously Employed: An In-depth look at Young Workers in Canada. Online.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Mahoney, T., Reusch, S., and Loufi, C. (2020). Together We Rise. Online. P. 16.



Why isn't youth engagement happening already?

"We need to be more trusting of youth, reduce qualifications in the youth that we recruit, trust youth, trust their voices and experiences, and give them more leeway."

— Habon Ali, Apathy is Boring Board Member

Since youth make up a large population of Canada and are great at innovating and problem solving, why isn't youth engagement already happening?

AGEISM

Most research on age discrimination covers bias against older people in the workforce and pays little attention to youth³². However, cutting edge research has found that across a large set of countries, younger people were more likely to report experiences of age discrimination than older people³³.

In a professional setting, young people are often left behind due to lack of credentials and work experience. Volunteering and educational experience are not considered as valuable, which leaves youth in the dreaded loop of «not getting jobs because they don't have experience, and because they don't have experience they can't find a job».

Ageism can be defined as making assumptions about a person based on labels or attitudes about age. Both young and older people can experience ageism. Ageism is also the tendency to structure society based on the needs of a specific age group and failing to respond appropriately to the real needs of all regardless of age³⁴.

Whether young people are perceived as lazy, disloyal, naïve, or even incompetent, these stereotypes are surprisingly well-established. 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!³⁵

³² Bratt, C., Abrams, D., & Swift, H. J. (2020). Supporting the old but neglecting the young? The two faces of ageism. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(5), 1029-1039. <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bibliotheques.uqam.ca/10.1037/dev0000903>

³³ Bratt, C., Abrams, D., Swift, H. J., Vauclair, C.-M., & Marques, S. (2018). Perceived age discrimination across age in Europe: From an ageing society to a society for all ages. *Developmental Psychology*, 54(1), 167-180. <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bibliotheques.uqam.ca/10.1037/dev0000398>

³⁴ Ontario Human Rights Commission (2012). Age Discrimination. Online.

³⁵ Gilliam and Bales, «Strategic Frame Analysis: Reframing America's Youth.» 8.

TOKENISTIC PARTICIPATION

“Tokenistic participation is not only an ineffective youth engagement strategy, it is harmful to youth empowerment.”

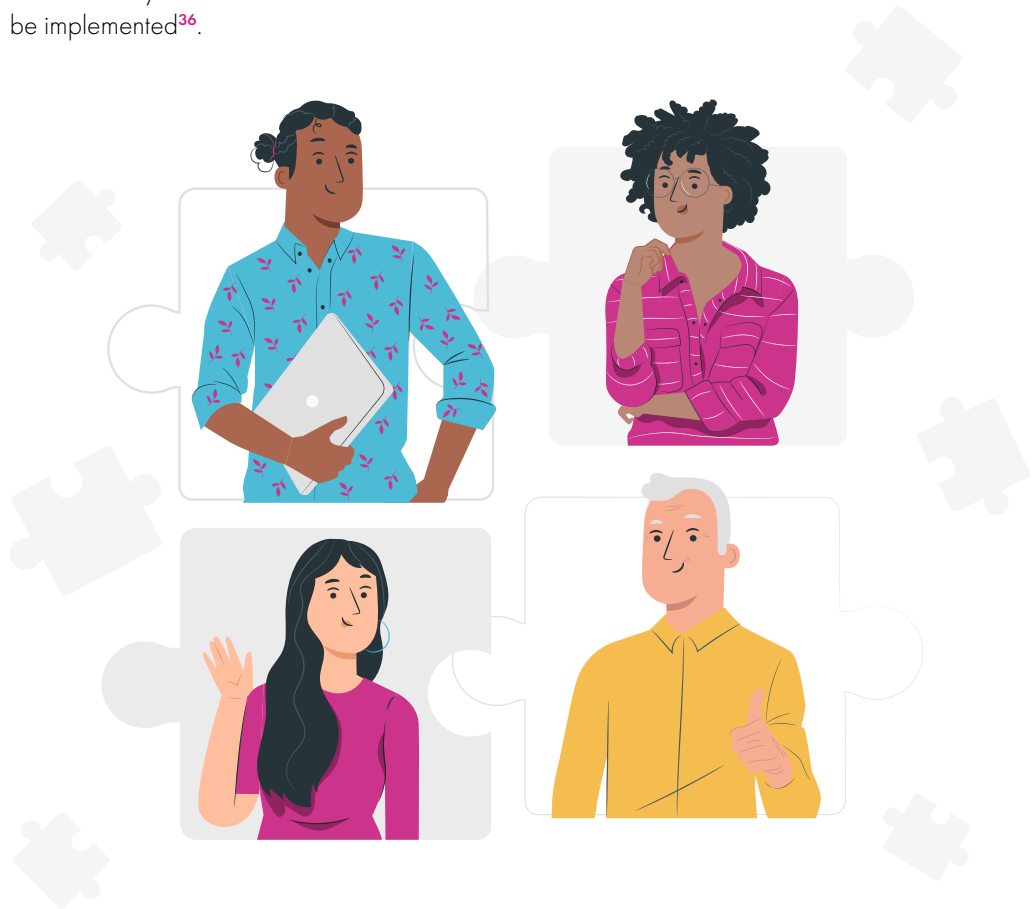
— Together We Rise Report

There is often an assumption that facilitating ‘youth voice’ within decision-making processes will necessarily have an influence on decisions. This is a false assumption. What often happens is institutional stakeholders give space for the youth to share their viewpoints but without any real accountability that their feedback and ideas will be implemented³⁶.

WHAT IS TOKENISM?

It is the superficial involvement of a group in the decision making process in ways that keep them powerless, under-informed and unaccountable.

To find out more about tokenism, we published this helpful guide: <https://www.youthfriendly.com/tokenism>



³⁶ Mahoney, T., Reusch, S., and Loufi, C. (2020). Together We Rise. Online.



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 the term 'outreach' can be misleading. 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. Before you reach out to youth, make sure that these opportunities are already available. 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

The methods behind reaching out to young people are unique and distinct. 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

In 2020, only **29%** of Canadian millennials engaged in unpaid volunteer work. Yet, when asked what the level of impact they believe people working together to solve problems can have, **88%** said it makes a difference. Young people believe that collaborative work can make a difference in their communities, we are just not being offered the opportunities to do so. By simply being the organization that asks youth to volunteer, you'll be way ahead of the game.

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, but it is nevertheless an important facet of youth engagement.

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.

Speaking of Canadians aged 18-24; 99% of them use Instagram, and 84% use Facebook. It's imperative to put time, effort, and careful curation into your social media presence if young people are your target demographic.³⁷

How does Apathy is Boring engage youth?

Apathy is Boring prioritizes reaching out to youth by going to where youth are. We don't expect young people to come to us. Instead, we find different avenues to reach them: whether that's through tabling on campuses (or concerts!), through online means, or through connecting with organizations to meet youth. Furthermore, our programs have ample opportunities for our young people to engage their friends. We encourage our teams of youth to share any opportunities with their networks. As an organization, we've found great success in meeting youth through these models.

³⁷ Social Media Lab (2020). The State of Social Media in Canada 2020: A new Survey Report from the Ryerson Social Media Lab. Online.



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.
- + Think about the reasons why people should know about/talk about/or follow you. Reinforce your brand essence, and be clear on why youth should look to you for certain things. Be intentional about what you share, and when you share it.
- + Use humor, and be lighthearted. Although it seems simple, "Memes" generate some of the highest engagement rates on our social channels, it's the content that keeps youth coming back to our pages again and again.
- + Try the 80:20 rule. There's already a wealth of excellent and well produced content out there, you don't need to be doing all the work yourself. If you don't have the proper resources to be constantly creating, share (with credit) 80% of your content from other sources, and produce 20% in-house.
- + 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 human and 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 coordinator 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 social 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, an online video, or an Instagram or Facebook live. 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.

SEVENTH STEP

Help us grow and continue our skills development. We're in, we've developed trust, and we're continuing to help you build relationships with other young people. The next step is to help us continue growing. Provide opportunities for young people in your team to develop and learn new skills. Fostering skills development will only allow your team to grow stronger and become more agile in the changing world!

Every time one young person walks through these steps with you, they become your most important resource 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



CASE STUDY



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Remember

Online content and campaigns should be a path to real-world engagement. Whether they're newsletter subscribers or social media friends, the youth you reach online need to be given direct pathways to become involved with your organization offline, such as volunteering or attending both online/offline 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, donor, executive, customer, or supporter.

Think of it this way: young people don't go to parties on Facebook, we 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.

VOTE

Apathy is Boring put all our online and offline best practices to work when we launched our biggest mobilization campaign to date: VOTE 2019.

Our campaign aimed to educate, mobilize, and ultimately inspire youth to vote in the Canadian federal election, while more broadly supporting youth to become thought leaders amongst their peer groups- leading to a decentralized movement of youth as change-makers.

Our VOTE campaign carved space for youth to engage in meaningful dialogue around the federal election both offline and online. By establishing a solid IRL engagement strategy (the "Ground Game") and a robust cross-channel social media campaign (the "Air Game") we made sure to provide engagement opportunities to suit all levels of interest, time, availability, and access.

The Ground Game

These activities involved on the ground, face to face outreach aimed at youth and first-time voters across the country. In total, we held 141 unique activities across 26 Canadian cities. In total, ground game activities engaged 5.5K youth IRL. From the feedback we gathered, 92% of our volunteers told us Apathy Is Boring understands them, and what they'd like to learn about.

The Air Game

To support the Ground Game and successfully engage as many youth as possible, our Communications team developed a broad media strategy aimed at informing youth about the federal election, all the while asserting Apathy is Boring's brand, and credibility as a youth-serving organization. The intention was to keep our followers engaged and interested in our work following the election, therefore it was important that we proved ourselves worthy of our audience's time.

In the end, our VOTE campaign posts had a combined reach of **1.4 million** across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

As an organization serving youth aged 18-30, we're constantly asking ourselves;

What do young people need right now?

How can we make our information/content more accessible?

How do we stay relevant and meaningful to today's youth culture?

Even if youth are not your primary audience, these questions are helpful to return to as you map out a youth engagement strategy both offline, and online.

The Seven Recommendations for Youth Friendly Practices

So, you're ready to reach out. You made the space and created engagement opportunities, and everything is ready to be filled. You're ready to build trust and ready to open your doors to us.

The next question is this:

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 Seven Recommendations³⁸ for Youth Engagement is a solid foundation for developing a youth-friendly philosophy and policy. These recommendations answer the needs of youth and fit the realities of your organizational culture. Moreover, when your work takes these recommendations to heart and actually make changes, you'll be fostering the wellbeing of communities, and a more robust democracy.

1. Empower youth in decision making:

Once you've made space for youth, it's time to ask yourself how can I make these spaces meaningful avenues for youth empowerment? It's important to empower youth to bring their ideas to life by giving them access and control. This allows youth to develop a sense of power and confidence in their own abilities, allowing for innovation and leadership.

2. Prioritizing anti-oppression training and tools:

As we stressed throughout this guide, youth are not a monolithic identity. Young people today are extremely diverse; arguably, the most diverse population in Canada.³⁹ As a result, it is pivotal that engagement with youth centers the diverse lived realities and barriers faced by youth. This means that you must operate in a framework that creates safe, conscious and open space especially for Indigenous, LGBTQ2IS+, disabled and racialized youth.

3. Incorporate (culturally appropriate) mentorship opportunities for supplemental support:

Carefully recruited mentors and peer mentors provides rich experiences for youth. Youth develop their networks and their skills and experiences. Additionally, peer mentorship allows youth to further develop their leadership skills and build on their capacities. It's a win-win for everyone!

³⁸ Apathy is Boring, Together We Rise (2020).

³⁹ Environics Report



- 4. Create and communicate the “sandbox” for innovation:** Setting realistic expectations and constraints must be understood by all parties: whether it’s the youth or your current team. This allows for transparency, trust, communication and respect. Setting these boundaries for innovation will allow for more effective discussions and design.
- 5. Reinforce the value of the skills, experience and power of young people:** Young people have diverse skills and experiences. Empower young people by celebrating their strengths and skills.
- 6. When it comes to recruitment: do the work:** There are barriers that exist for some youth that make it hard for them to get engaged. This is where you come in - do the work by seeking these youth out intentionally and meeting them where we are. This means creating programs and initiatives that are accessible: be flexible and provide extra support when we need you.
- 7. Incorporate feedback and be responsive to youth:** Create spaces for youth where they can provide you with ongoing feedback. Value and place importance on their feedback, and take measures to bring any of their recommendations to fruition.

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

EMPOWERMENT

To do something that matters;

POWER

To make real decisions, and actually be heard;

CONNECTEDNESS

To be part of a community.

What being Youth Friendly looks like

After you've incorporated the Seven Recommendations for Youth Engagement, 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

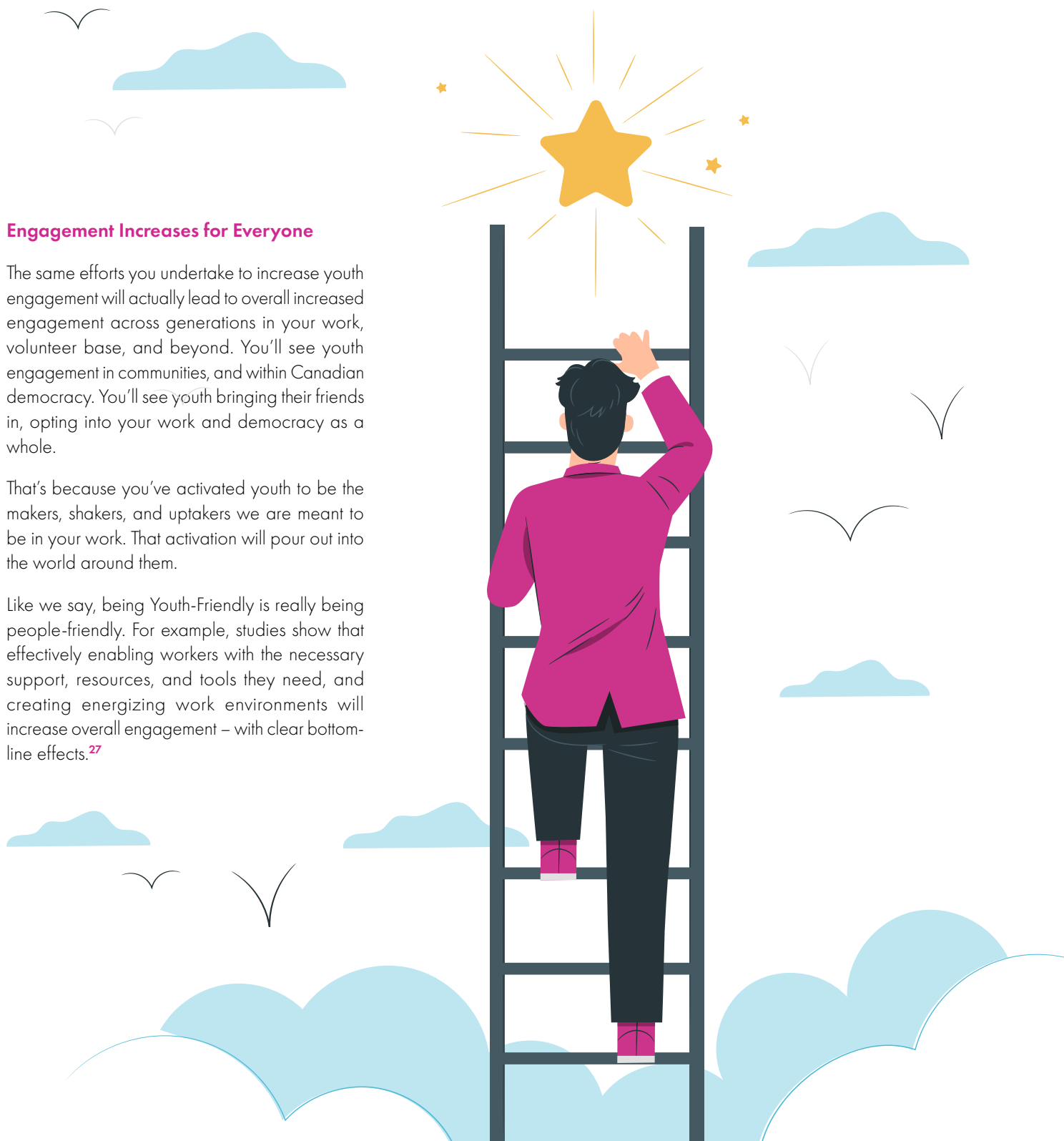
Coordinating the ongoing training required to orient youth and give them a full picture of the organization can actually close knowledge gaps in your organization that you didn't even know were there, whether on your board or even among management.²⁴ It's rare that everyone is on the same page in any 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.

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 work, volunteer base, and beyond. You'll see youth engagement in communities, and within Canadian democracy. You'll see youth bringing their friends in, opting into your work and democracy as a whole.

That's because you've activated youth to be the makers, shakers, and uptakers we are meant to be in your work. That activation will pour out into the world around them.

Like we say, being Youth-Friendly is really being people-friendly. For example, 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

CASE STUDY



CITYHIVE
Vancouver, BC

Founded in 2017 by Veronika Bylicki and Tesicca Truong, two young people in Vancouver, CityHive envisions cities where youth are involved in civic planning, shaping, and decision-making. They wanted to find a solution since it was clear that young people want to engage meaningfully, but are not finding the opportunities to commit energy, knowledge and youth ideas to solving problems.

To answer this, they provide a number of youth-driven programming to transform the way young people shape their cities and the civic processes that engage them. Some of their programs include the Envirolab, City Shapers, and multiple civic education programs in collaboration with municipalities all over the Lower Mainland in British Columbia. They are also keen collaborators with other organizations.

At the heart of these programs are youth voices and youth engagement, with program participants under the age of 30. Furthermore, many of their staff members and board members are under the age of 30. They've provided the space, the tools, and knowledge for meaningful youth engagement in their organization.

CASE STUDY



SANTROPOL ROULANT
Montreal, QC

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 Santropol Roulant has become a vibrant, enduring cornerstone of the Montreal community.

Since 1995, this organization has grown to offer more than just their signature meals-on-wheels program. The team of the Santropol Roulant 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. Their areas of impact include food security, social inclusion, and community engagement.

Santropol Roulant's volunteer team 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 little over 20 staff members. The difference at Santropol 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



Conclusion

Becoming youth-friendly is going to take some work. It will require support from all levels of your team: from the frontline staff, supervisors, and management. You will need to address discrimination and rework 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 an ongoing process, not a short-term project. With appropriate support, preparation, and planning, youth can revolutionize the way you work. We help sharpen an organization's service delivery and prepare it for the new demographic landscape that is developing.

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

With thorough youth engagement practices, you're doing more than just supporting your work. You're empowering young people to be decision-makers, shakers, and change-makers in their communities. You're helping build the future of our democracy, by creating engaged and empowered citizens.

REMEMBER

You aren't alone in working toward this. Apathy is Boring is committed to seeing young people become decision-makers and active citizens in their communities. That's why we are proud to provide our services through the Youth-Friendly Program. We have plenty of experience, and we offer proven services and resources to ease the process, so don't hesitate to contact us.



About Apathy is Boring

Our vision

A Canada where every young Canadian is an active citizen, and youth are meaningfully engaged in all aspects of the democratic process. This is more than just voting: it's about setting up youth to take charge of the conditions they live in.

Our Programs

We offer a variety of programs for youth and by youth. To learn more about our programs, please visit our website: www.apathyisboring.com

Our Values

Youth as Decision-Makers: We create space for youth in decision making roles. We support and encourage governments and institutions to do the same.

Reaching the Unengaged: We believe in doing the hard work to reach and activate unengaged youth. We recognize that systems of oppression affect youth's ability to engage in democracy in different ways and do not assume universal experience. Having inclusive participation in our democracy is one way to have a more equitable society.

Provide information: We provide information in an accessible way to educate and inform young people. We don't believe in preaching and we value non-partisanship.

Being Accountable: We are accountable to young Canadians. We remain authentic, open to debate and discussion. We are transparent about our successes and failures

Being Accessible: We provide low risk entry points. We go to where young people are and don't expect them to come to us. Where possible, we break down physical, linguistic or visual barriers.

Being Intergenerational: We value intergenerational relationships and seek out support from elders and community leaders.

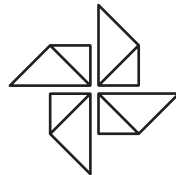
Our Methodology

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

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

Experiment and Innovate: Before we commit to a new activity, we test different ways to accomplish our mission. We gather data to evaluate the performance of each activity and program, to allow us to also identify high impact solutions for the problems we are tackling.

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.



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**Connect, Educate
and Activate.**



Apathy is Boring and the History of Youth Friendly



Apathy is Boring developed the Youth-Friendly Guide to originally help non-profit professionals meaningfully engage young people in shaping and directing their organizations. This edition of the guide goes beyond working with the non-profit sector. We're confident that our approach will benefit all sectors including business, non-profits, government, security, technology and more.



The **Youth-Friendly Program** has 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 fifth edition of the Youth-Friendly Guide.

Thanks to:

The Apathy is Boring Board Members

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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.

21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act

(Bob Joseph, 2018)

An essential guide for Canadians to read and understand the Indian Act, and its repercussions on Indigenous people.

Age discrimination

(Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2012)

A brochure by the Ontario Human Rights Commission that demystifies age discrimination.

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 citizenship in the digital age

(W. Lance Bennett, Civic Life Online: Learning how digital media can engage youth, 2008)

An examination of the relationship between online action and real-world politics by discussing how online networks can

inspire conventional political participation and also by exploring how creative uses of digital technology are expanding the boundaries of politics.

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.

Diverse, engaged and precariously employed: an in depth look at young workers in Canada

(Canadian Labour Congress, 2016)

A research paper that provides a broad landscape of the social and economic realities of young workers in Canada.

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring

(MENTOR, 2009)

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

Future-proof: Preparing young Canadians for the future of work

(Sarah Doyle and Creig Lamb, Brookfield Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, 2017)

A report to help understand the complex job market requirements millennials are facing and identify the most valuable skills for the future of work in Canada.

#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.

Perceived age discrimination across age in Europe: From an ageing society to a society for all ages

(Christopher Bratt et al, Developmental Psychology, 2020)

A research paper about age discrimination in Europe that highlights that more research is needed to address ageism in youth and across the life span and not only adults.

Strategic Frame Analysis: Reframing America's Youth

(Susan Bales and Franklin D. Jr. Gilliam, Social policy report/Society for Research in Child Development, 2001)

This paper applies the basic principles of strategic frame analysis to discern what Americans think about youth, why they do so while exploring the consequences this has for youth policy and policy advocates.

Supporting the old but neglecting the young? The two faces of ageism

(Christopher Bratt et al, Developmental Psychology, 2020)

A research paper about age based discrimination that highlights that strategies for reducing age prejudice must address ageism as a multigenerational challenge.

The Canadian Millennials Social Values Studies

(Environics Institute for Survey Research and Apathy is Boring, 2017).

Examines Millennials, revealing the diversity of this group of young people in Canada.

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.

The Skin We're In

(Desmond Cole, 2020)

An exploration of one year - 2017 - and the racism that occurs within the year, month by month; dispelling the myth that there is no racism in Canada.

Together We Rise

(Apathy is Boring, 2020)

A report highlighting the changing modes of civic and political participation in Canada. This report also introduces a new framework called "Youth-Led Democratic Innovation".

Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter in Canada

(Rodney Diverlus, Sandy Hudson and Syrus Marcus Ware, 2020)

Exploring Canadian Black activism and organizing, along with dispelling the myth that Canada is "nice".

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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