

# Engaging Youth in Municipal Climate Action

## Introduction

1. Youth engagement is the meaningful and sustained involvement of young people in actions and decisions about matters of importance to themselves and others, that enable them to shape their communities and society positively. It is about adults and young people working together as partners to act, make decisions, and create change.
2. Youth represent a third of Canada's population and have unmatched confidence in their ability to contribute positively to the world. Engaging youth in government and policy prepares them to become active citizens who contribute to the well-being of their communities, society and the economy.
3. Climate change poses significant threats to future generations. Children and youth are most vulnerable to the devastating effects of climate change, and yet, they are given little voice in the shaping of their future.
4. Municipalities have direct control over about 3 – 6% of a community's emissions through the delivery of municipal services (transit, facilities, waste, water, etc.), but municipalities have indirect influence over 40 – 60% of a community's energy use through land use, transit, building energy use, etc.
5. As such, municipalities are critical leaders in advancing the climate actions needed to achieve greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets. It is essential that youth are involved in local climate action as many of the plans and policies developed today will have impacts over the next few decades. Engaging youth is an important aspect of succession planning and climate commitment follow through.

## Benefits of Youth Engagement

6. Youth engagement helps young people believe and understand they have a vital role to play in government, policy and climate action. It allows them to provide their input, influence decisions that will affect their future and gives them a chance to break down generational barriers while connecting with and giving back to their communities.
7. Youth benefit through:
  - Increased climate awareness, resilience and sense of responsibility - making them well-positioned to lead positive environmental and social change;
  - Increased self-esteem and development of networking, communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills;
  - Improved health and well-being, lower delinquency and drug and alcohol abuse; and
  - Improved academic performance leading to higher graduation rates.
8. Communities benefit through:
  - Development of active citizens with improved climate literacy and understanding and increased capacity to create change;
  - Improved youth health and well-being indicators; and
  - Enhances community liveability and competitiveness and encourages environmental and social responsibility amongst young people.

**9. Municipalities benefit through:**

- Gaining a better appreciation and understanding of youth needs now and into the future;
- Creating meaningful environmental change informed by diverse experiences and rising above traditional barriers; and
- Attracting funders and recognition while possibly generating increased revenue streams through collaboration and innovation.

**Barriers to Youth Engagement****10. Youth face barriers to civic and climate engagement such as:**

- Trust-related barriers leading to youth feeling under/unappreciated;
- Feeling intimidated due to the lack of climate-related experience or knowledge;
- Structural barriers and a lack of understanding of navigating through political spaces and understanding climate jargon;
- Lack of clarity of expectations and obscurity about the feedback they provide; and
- Logistical barriers such as lack of compensation and scheduling and timing conflicts

**11. Municipalities face barriers such as:**

- Challenges in identifying youth interested in climate action, creating appropriate opportunities, finding the resources and possible incentives to drive and support youth engagement.

**Opportunities to Enhance Youth Engagement****12. Increasing Networking Between Municipalities and Youth Groups**

Advancing collective networking opportunities between youth groups and municipal climate staff can be beneficial in engaging youth while saving time and effort for both youth groups and municipalities.

**13. Developing a Youth Onboarding Program**

Developing a virtual Municipal Climate Policies and Actions Youth Onboarding Program with ongoing availability would support youth to understand municipal climate issues and provide input.

**14. Developing a Municipal Youth Engagement Strategy and/or Youth Internship Program**

Bringing youth to work with municipal governments to support the delivery of municipal actions through a youth engagement strategy and/or youth internship programs is an ideal mechanism to ensure youth involvement in municipal planning and implementation.

**15. Collaboration across Municipalities on Youth Engagement Efforts and Lessons Learned**

Sharing successes and failures of youth engagement methods would help ensure that municipalities are using innovative methods and continually raising the bar on youth engagement efforts.

**Municipal Implications**

16. Engaging youth in municipal actions help us make our communities more inclusive for young people to live and grow. Involving youth in local governments early on means municipalities are better prepared for succession.

17. Active and engaged youth can support municipal innovation and services. By encouraging youth to participate in climate initiatives, municipalities can create positive impact on a personal level and the overall development of societies and economies.

## Related Webinars and Further Reading

18. Clean Air Partnership's Report – [Collaborating for a Better Future: Engaging Youth in Municipal Climate Action](#) and [Webinar](#)
19. [Municipal Youth Engagement Best Practices Report 2020](#)
20. [FCM's Municipal youth Engagement Handbook](#)

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