

The Youth Friendly Guide

The Youth Guidebook to Policy Change for intergenerational Partnerships



***Canadian Environmental Network - Youth Caucus
With thanks to the Youth for Habitat II Canada! Project.***

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Introduction

Ageism exists. It's real. Every time someone judges another person on the basis of their age instead of their abilities or qualities, every time a youth representative is called "naïve or even affectionately "idealistic"; this is ageism.

Imagine a young man of colour being told... "You must be a good basketball player" or a woman being told... "You are just like my wife: over-emotional. " This would be unacceptable. Youth representatives, however, when trying to work with adults, are often on the defensive with their contributions marginalized. We stuff the envelopes, we paint the banners, but how often are we able to help make the decisions?

The most serious indicator of this marginalization is so obvious that it's funny. The largest youth institutions are completely dominated by adults: schools. This is not to say there are no cool teachers or mentors with much to offer youth. We don't advocate a youth movement that is isolated from our greater community, or age segregation. However, there needs to be more acceptance on the part of adults and youth, more co-operation between the generations. Youth need to empower themselves and go beyond the status quo.

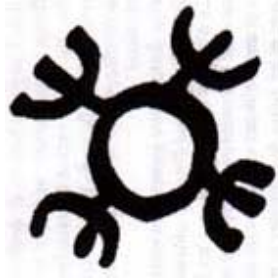
Decisions that concern our lives, in a world whose population is over 50% youth, must be made in partnership with youth.

This guide is for people who want to make a difference in a traditionally adult dominated world. It is a guide written by youth for everyone. It is for organisations or people who want to make their operations youth-friendly or work in partnership with youth, and for youth who lack support in their role as a 'youth voice'. With this guide, we hope to stimulate thought and constructive changes. The guide will be constantly updated and strengthened as more youth integrate into adult programs, boards and spaces.

The Youth-Friendly guide has been compiled by a network of youth who work with adults in the environmental movement, but perhaps it is useful to others as well. Our information comes from United Nations reports, treaties and commitments, from the youth brainstorm circles in Hamilton at the 1996 Habit-Action Forum, and from the direct experience of young people working on boards of adult organisations or otherwise participating in adult processes.

Ageism: Discrimination against someone on the basis of his or her age

Today's youth bring a clarity to problem solving not found in other demographic entities. Why is this? Perhaps it is because we have fewer vested interests in the status quo: most of us don't expect to amass wealth the way our parents and grandparents did. We are not yet committed to personal responsibilities; we have not formed loyalties that spring from self-interest. We have the freedom to assess what is of benefit to the greater society, unencumbered by the influence of past agendas, and the energy to risk new solutions. What we need for real inclusion in policy making is the openness and courage to learn new ways of working; true intergenerational partnership.



Is a subversive symbol from the alternative youth movement in San Bernardo, Chile, based on the Mapuche image for Holistic thought, spirit, emotion and action, it means 'change in many directions, movement toward a more Holistic Way...

A) INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP GRAPH AND PRINCIPLES

- 8 Excellent!**
 - Strong partnership
 - Youth initiated and shared decisions with Adults
- 7 Youth and Adult initiated and directed**
- 6 Adult initiated – Shared decision with youth**
- 5 Youth have been consulted and informed**
- 4 Youth have been assigned but not involved**
- 3 Tokenism**
- 2 Decorations**
- 1 Terrible**
 - No partnership at all
 - Manipulation

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

1. Shared Control:

For true partnership, youth voices must be taken into account in decision-making from the start, their inclusion should be clearly recognised and their work attributed to them. Simple tokenism will only diminish the role of youth.

2. Accept Youth Forms of Expression:

In setting up youth participation, the atmosphere must be affirming to youth's culture and lifestyle. New generation members are often sceptical of some of the trappings of adulthood - formality, suits, and official bureaucratic processes. Youth should have access to role models that encourage creativity and individuality. Youth have the right to expect adults to honour their forms of expression. Small corrections are acceptable - English, French and Aboriginal languages demand the adherence to some rules, but painting, illustration, music, artistic and journalistic expression should be encouraged. In this way, young people feel that the finished expression fully reflects their own thought processes.

From tokenism to co-operative interaction between youth and adults

3. Make Connections Between Generations:

Partnerships work best when connections are made with other demographic groups who have similar experiences to share. In the case of ageism, senior citizens suffer discrimination along with youth. Discussion should be promoted which highlights each group's experience of ageism and how to combat it. In-group work, it is a good thing to include both generations. Youth can bring fresh and creative views to the table, while seniors provide wisdom and experience. Discussion mechanisms that make it easier for seniors to participate such as good lighting, large print and comfortable chairs can be promoted by youth for synergism.

The synergism or Cupertino that results will be a stronger force than either demographic group would muster by itself.

4. Keep Real Expectations:

Harbouring unrealistic expectations of youth is destructive to both youth and adults working with them. Encourage everyone involved to expect only what is reasonable. Make sure realistic goals are set co-operatively, and encourage youth to hold adults to their commitments. Partnerships and expectations should work both ways.

"Ensure that the participants have been informed on all issues, as to facilitate optimal involvement
BRAD DUPLISEA, 26, P.E.I.

5. Provide Support not Direction:

Support young people with adult experience; do not threaten them with it. Encourage youth to be the best they can and to set their own direction, but also encourage them to seek out the services of specialists when the occasion warrants. Where tasks are generally unfamiliar to youth, set up mentorship and ensure that trust exists and flows in both directions. Take steps to ensure all transactions and processes are open and transparent. Mentors and specialists should be people who are trusted, or even chosen, by the youth.

6. Encourage Respect:

Partnership cannot work without mutual respect. Making time for a brainstorming process to jointly draft and agree to principles of respect can lay a strong foundation for intergenerational partnership. Respect may not be initially present in the process but the willingness to allow respect to grow must be in place right from the start.

7. Establish Clear Lines of Communications:

Adults and youth must communicate openly and on an on-going basis for any partnership to work.

Attempts to shut youth out of the decision-making process, lack of consultation, or the pursuit of hidden agendas will be destructive to true intergenerational partnership. Youth, and adults, harbour feelings of resentment if communication is not clear and accountable.

B) HOW TO MAKE YOUR ORGANIZATION YOUTH FRIENDLY

What is a youth friendly organisation?

It is an organisation that:

- (a) Respects the principles of youth participation.
- (b) Runs programs by and/or for youth.
- (c) Places itself at a high level on the illustrative "Graph" (Page #3)
- (d) Monitors its attitude toward youth and the participation of youth.

“In order to develop the full potential of young people and prepare them to take a responsible role in the development of human settlements, Governments at the appropriate levels, ... non-governmental organisations, community based organisations, should ... integrate youth concerns into all relevant national, subnational and local policies, strategies, programmes and projects; ...”

Youth for Habitat II Canada, GPA Tool

What can youth offer to an adult group?

- * A fresh perspective.
- * Unbiased Perception - a view of the world unbiased by personal baggage.
- * A bridge to other youth. Older youth can mentor younger youth.
- * Enthusiasm and high energy levels.
- * Flexibility: the ability to examine a question from more than one perspective.
- * Creativity: the exploration of new ways to solve problems.
- * Pro-activeness: Youth can reach adults halfway if given half a chance.

“There is a pressing need for the youth all over the world to take an active part in every level of decision making, since it affects their lives, and has far reaching effects on their future.”

Youth in Sustainable Development, AGENDA 21, Chap. 25, Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992.

What can an adult group offer to youth?

- * Social justice: the right of youth to be involved in decision-making.
- * Inclusion in every step in the planning process, not just tokenism.
- * Respect for our unique views and perspectives.
- * Sharing of power with youth.
- * Allowing youth to guide outcomes.
- * Sensitivity: the adult group must develop instincts to know when to positively assert influence and when to remain passive.
- * Trust of youth who are trustworthy.
- * Honesty: being up-front about the role of youth right from the start.
- * Recognise that youth are a distinct group with distinctive social characteristics and needs.

How to break the barriers?

- * Acting on that recognition, develop mechanisms within the organisation that foster linkages with youth in appropriate ways: set up mentorship, internships, or designate "Intervener" adults whose job it is to monitor the progress of the partnership between generations.
- * Educate adults in your organisation to respect youth as a sector. Hold consciousness-raising workshops if necessary.
- * Draft an anti-discrimination policy with specific reference to ageism. Emphasise zero tolerance of discrimination on the basis of age, colour, race, gender, sexual orientation or religion.
- * Empower youth to speak out if they encounter ageism discrimination in the organisation. Take their comments/complaints seriously. Develop a complaint resolution mechanism, which works and does not appear bureaucratic.
- * Invite adults into 'youth space', involving them in differing ways with youth processes and youth of all ages. This is probably the best hands-on way of fostering communication and trust.

C) HOW TO MAKE A MEETING YOUTH-FRIENDLY:

What makes youth uncomfortable with context and process?

- * Large documents: they generally go unread.
- * Jargon and acronyms known only to insiders.
- * Lack of information so that youth cannot choose to follow or break dress codes.
- * Formal bureaucratic procedure that slows the pace needlessly.
- * Agreements reached in back rooms, bars or restaurants where youth are not present.
- * Receiving the agenda too late to be able to make effective changes.
- * Inflexible meeting times with no consideration given to limiting factors like transportation or educational responsibilities.
- * Patronising behaviour on the part of organisers.

"No generation in the history of humanity has been faced with such swift and sustained transformation as the present one... Many of the answers to (current) challenges can and will come from the young people themselves, if they are given a chance to express themselves."

Chap. 6, Our Creative Diversity, WCCD, 1996.

'Youth-Friendly' Context and Process for Meetings:

- * Have more than one youth participate. Support can be gained from a group.
- * Keep a sense of humour. Avoid formality. Make sure everyone gets to know everyone else.
- * Make sure youth are highlighted in the process: involve a youth facilitator.
- * Encourage informal communication as part of the process.
- * Watch for stagnation of process and/or ideas. Have a mechanism ready to put in place to help break the ice or loosen people up.
- * Allow time for people to stretch or exercise or move to some degree.
- * Allow a mentor or interlocutor to sit with the youth group to provide explanations, especially early in the process.
- * Provide appropriate food, i.e. juice as coffee and healthy snacks.

"Rather than be treated as passive consumers and indifferent spectators of their own destiny, they should become involved as active agents and participants in the life of their communities.

CHAP. 6, Our Creative Diversity, WCCD, 1996.

YOUTH CAN WORK WELL WITH MENTORS!

By working in partnership with adults, youth can gain valuable skills and knowledge. Mentorship, done right, saves us from having to re-invent the wheel.

The Ottawa Youth Bioregional Initiative worked strongly with 7 community mentors like John Bond, implementing the Habitat Agenda on the ground.

Youth for Habitat II Canada! worked successfully with Mrs. Valerie Raymond of the Canadian Delegation to Habitat II, and Mrs. Elizabeth Barot of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

We had a trip to Niagara Falls instead of a bar on our free night.

YOUTH SPACE!

By-youth, for-youth organising has challenges and highlights. For Youth for Habitat II Canada! We created our own process. We planned and co-ordinated all our activities.

“We felt most natural at the international partnership retreat and at our evaluation retreat.”

“We did games at the National Forum, lying on each other's bellies and passing on a laugh!”

What makes youth uncomfortable with selection, preparation and debriefing?

- * An unfair selection process.
- * The same youth being asked repeatedly for participation, i.e. tokenism.
- * Inadequate preparation given by organisers (briefing notes, introductions to other participants, terms of reference)
- * No exit consultations or debriefing afterwards. A lack of interest in our thoughts, conclusions, or contributions to the meeting when it is finished.

"Youth and children constitute over 50% of the total population of the world. In the "majority world", over 60% of the population is under the age of 30 with over 30% between the ages of 14-25. Today over 84% of youth are concentrated in "majority world" countries where living conditions are often far from adequate.

WORLD BANK, 1995

'Youth-Friendly' selection, Preparation and debriefing for Meetings:

- * Support youth to run an open, democratic and transparent delegate selection process. Jointly establish clear terms of reference, lines of communication and accountability to their own constituency.
- * Provide background information on dress code, timelines and accepted social conventions that allows youth to choose their image and participation in the meeting.
- * Send youth representatives detailed information packages and make a briefing phone call before the meeting so that youth delegates arrive at the meeting fully prepared. Send background information on youth participants from other areas, or orientation information about processes.
- * Allow time for evaluation by youth delegates and seek feedback at the end of the meeting. 'Check-ins' and 'closing rounds' can provide this space.
- * Often, adults already know each other before processes begin. Provide youth contacts with names and addresses of other delegates upon request (and with participants' permission).
- * In planning a process, harness new technologies used by youth such as the Internet, and provide facilitation tools such as flipcharts or rounds to make participation easier.
- * Often youth wish to participate more fully but are constrained by financial limitations. Intervener funding which respects a youth's cash flow needs with advances can be very helpful.

How to make sure representation really exists: "Make sure it's not always the same person who represents us at everything..."

Julie Archambault, 17, Ontario

D) HOW TO MAKE A DOCUMENT REAL TO YOUTH:

Involve and consult youth from the start in developing the document. Youth, in turn, will take an interest in what is written.

Try to ensure the writing is dynamic and participatory

In formulating words and format, provide titles with direct focus questions and straightforward answers. Incorporate small stories and examples, which illustrate your point.

Do not send youth extensive mail-out questionnaires. A phone interview is better, or even electronic mail (E-mail).

Try to make research documents accessible to youth. Commit to accessible documents generally.

Do not reference everything. Include a list of sources at the end for further research. Provide a good index if the document is large.

Provide tables with good graphics, cartoons or drawings that summarise.

Be more creative in language expression. Pull up interesting quotes, highlight main ideas, and use interesting graphic techniques.

“...Present the essential ideas for youth to absorb first in a brochure, let us host a participatory workshop ourselves, and then integrate our comments into your documents afterwards.”

Marie Segger, 22, British Columbia

E) HOW TO BUILD A STRONG PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN YOUTHS

Vision

Using a younger youth model can be empowering, advantageous and can offer incredible experience for all involved, Breaking the barriers of age and experience levels can be achieved via a co-operative relationship between younger and more experienced youth. Working together in partnership, the experience can prove to be a valuable learning/teaching relationship with the emphasis on process not performance. This working relationship is based on collaborated goals and expectations that is a balance between knowledge sharing and self-motivated trial and error.

“...Never underestimate or overestimate someone else’s potential...”
Kate Alexander, 16, Vancouver

Structure

Agree upon the terms and wording of the relationship.

Have the proper lead in time and appropriate project timeliness

There must be time set aside for processing, to create space for reflection, for re-evaluation, for voice and for trial and error.

Have clearly defined goals and expectations from all parties set ahead of scheduled project start.

Have in place a system that can, using the goals and expectations that were originally set out, continually be evaluated in a consistent and clear way together by everyone.

Set an unalterable meeting time for troubleshooting and check-in.

Create a timeline with tasks including commitment and responsibility for work.

Recommendations

Have a realistic appraisal of available time.

Be sensitive to diverse learning styles.

Acknowledge and validate different levels of experience, understanding and output potential.

Accept that level of experience will change over time.

Keep the ratio as close to one mentor per younger youth as possible.

Have an appropriate age gap between those involved.

Keep written information for frequent reference.

Have social get-togethers to build trust and personal dynamics.

“The disintegration of the fabric of society, as seen in the marginalization of young people and women, whose duties and responsibilities are still too often enumerated before any mention is made of their rights.”

Preparing for the 20th Century, Medium-Term Strategy 1996-2001, 1996

F) YOUTH REPRESENTATION IN ADULT PROCESSES:

- * A real selection process is essential to produce accountable, true representation.
- * It is not enough to call a friend, or choose a family member.
- * Moreover, it is essential that the same person is not always chosen to represent their group or region's view.

In the World Program of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, governments commit to; “facilitation of advocacy, participation to build up tolerance and solidarity; promotion and enablement of personal and spiritual development, whereby youth can take up responsibility for their own development; development of human resource potential of youth training and education; improvement of information and communication and networks among youth; capacity building and improvement of youth organisations; establishment and expansion of partnerships among groups and related national/global organisation;”

World Program of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond

G) STEP BY STEP TOWARD A YOUTH-FRIENDLY ORGANIZATION

(Table coming soon)

CONCLUSION...

Youth and adults alike must work towards true and sustainable partnerships, in order to promote understanding and empathy for youth specific issues and perspectives. However, at the same time ' youth need to be careful not to ghetto-ize our issues. The level of youth involvement in an organisation or in a society is often an indicator of the level of inclusion for ethnic groups, the aged, the disabled, and those of different sexual orientations. We need to gain a stronger voice for excluded sectors in society. Youth need to pick up the challenge of partnership building and actively approach organisations to become involved. A lot of doors are unlocked, but unless youth

turn the doorknobs we will never realise the possibilities open to them.

We have a chance to learn from adult mentors about power structures, contexts, and strategies without having to repeat the same mistakes, using the long standing experience and traditions of activism from adults and our own unique, creative energy. Youth need to take advantage of the wealth of information and experience available to us through mentorship models. If we can participate and share skills effectively, we can learn more in less time, allowing for more self-reflection about our activism. This will lead to a strong

Awareness of our movement's problems and subsequent solutions. Self-evaluation and consciousness are some of the only tools that will prevent youth movements from having to constantly re-invent ourselves as a result of being co-opted by the power structures. A challenge for youth is to find a balance between ghetto-izing our issues and being co-opted by the power structures. Needless to say, a lot more challenges await youth in our society; these can only be solved by increasing partnerships towards a more holistic, socially and environmentally just world.

Did I hear Generation X? Naaaaah... Generation Y for Youth, maybe. Generation Z for Zeal? Definitely!

A NOTE, ABOUT SOME COOL YOUTH WHO HELPED PUT THIS TOGETHER...

Kate Alexander, 17, was one of three editors for a youth book and sustainability indicators package with Peace Child International in London. She presented a workshop at the Global Youth Forum for LJNEP in San Francisco, 1995 and was one of the Youth Co-ordinators for the Leadership Initiative for a Future Earth (LIFE) Boat Flotilla project. Kate was a co-Coordinator of the International Solidarity and Partnership Retreat for Youth for Habitat 11 Canada, and is was by far the youngest staff person on a 16-member team across Canada who pulled together a process for youth involvement in the Habitat 11 conference at Istanbul. She worked on policy change at the PrepCommIII in New York and the United Nations Conference itself in Istanbul. She studies at Point Grey Mini-School, a school with an alternative, holistic approach to learnings She thinks that it is crucial not to assume things about young people, not to judge youth potential, but instead to get to know them and learn to work together.

Amelia Clarke, 23, is actively involved with the New Brunswick Environment Network and the Canadian Environmental Network, through both the Youth Caucuses and the Forest Caucuses. She is a Coordinator in the Youth for Habitat 11 Project, and has helped groups all over Canada and other parts of the majority world "network". She participated in the Canadian Consultation on the International Panel of Forests as the only youth. Amelia is a co-founder of the New Brunswick based group, 'Friends of the Christmas Mountains', and after four years on the campaign hopes to see this last stand of old growth protected soon. After working within a few different provincial, regional and national networks, both "adult" and youth, Amelia has experienced first hand the need for "youth friendly" consultations, meetings and organisations. She is now giving workshops and holding youth consultations to make this change.

Ilona Dougheny, 16, is a co-chair of the Canadian Environmental Network Youth Caucus and has a contract as the staff person and Coordinator of the Northern Environmental Network (NorNet). Ilona is the co-Coordinator of Students Aware Of Our World, which organised youth activities, conferences, and speaking tours in the north through a process called Violence Injustice Environment World Issues, and is helping to co-ordinate and information exchange partnership between her group and AMYUEN in Argentina. She was the co-organiser and facilitator of the CEN Youth Caucus Vision and Strategy Retreat in 1996, and the Yukon Youth Environmental Leadership Conference. She has been a community activist involved in a variety of projects from Food Bank drives to Social Justice committees for a number of years, is currently working at Stepping Stone, the Franciscan Wilderness Retreat, and has a small business making jewellery in her spare time. She is a strong advocate for a youth voice in decision-making.

Brad Duplisea, 26, is a co-chair of the Canadian Environmental Network Youth Caucus, and also a member of the steering committee of the Environmental Coalition of Prince Edward Island (ECO PEI), and is on the steering committee of the Prince Edward Island Enviro Network. He is executive secretary of the Central Queens Wildlife Federation, and Project Coordinator of Environmental Projects for the North Queens Wildlife Federation, including two Youth Services Canada projects with many youth staff. Brad believes that not only do youth have unharnessed energy and optimism, but that they truly represent one of the unbiased voices left in society. They are not blackmailed by economic, political or social pressures and they recognise the scarily finite nature of our resources.

Michel, 21, is a bioregional Coordinator with the Youth for Habitat II Canada! Project, and is a member of the Ontario Environment Network Steering Committee. He is in the process of creating a Youth Caucus for the OEN. He is a co-founder of the Clean Water Coalition, a Guelph based organisation, which ensured the preservation of the Hanlon Creek Watershed through the adoption

of the ideal option of a natural heritage plan. Michel was also a member of the Community Advisory Sub-Committee for the Guelph Landfill Search Group, which tried to find a suitable landfill site through a community driven consensus-based decision making process. He has also chaired and led tours for the Mill Creek Watershed Liaison Team, a community group that is trying to find a balance between industrial gravel pit interests and the quiet rural lifestyle of its residents. He is a former board member of the Ontario Public Interest Research Group of Toronto and is active with the Environmental Working Group that raises environmental awareness at the University of Toronto. He is also an active member of the Environmental Protection Advisory Committee and the Environmental Students' Union at the University of Toronto. He worked with the International Facilitating Group of Non-Governmental Organisations in Turkey at Habitat II, and though 30 years younger than everyone present, facilitated meetings. He feels that experience shows that the level of youth participation in an organisation is in fact an indicator of the organisations' diversity (age, gender and ethnic) and openness.

Marie Segger, 23, is national Coordinator of Youth for Habitat II Canada! Project, past steering committee member of the British Columbia Environmental Network, past Co-Chair of the Canadian Environmental Network Youth Caucus, and a member of the International Affairs Caucus of the CEN. She is co-founder of the West Coast Ecological Youth Alliance, a partnership of youth organisations in Canada, Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico, the Friends of Carmanah-Walbran, which is fighting to protect the last 1/3 of the Walbran ancient temperate rainforest, and the Group Representing Youth for Future Interests Now, who spoke for the youth sector on the Commission On Resources and the Environment for sane land use planning in BC. She is an Environmental Youth Alliance board member, a past radio show organiser for Socially Aware Youth With Healthy Attitudes Today (SAY WHAT!), co-publisher of War No More (youth poetry in hope of peace), past co-editor of Forward Magazine, and co-director of the Association for Street Kids play, 'Addict'. She was involved in Youth '92, and the 1992 Earth Summit youth activism, and was Youth Advisor on the Canadian Delegation to the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1996. She knows that youth can sometimes be a voice of sanity in processes that are not looking out for the interests of future generations, and sees that they need opportunities to become involved in decision-making.

Thanks to ... Youth for Habitat II, Canada!!!

EDITED BY THE YOUTH CAUCUS, CANADIAN ENVIRONMENT NETWORK

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