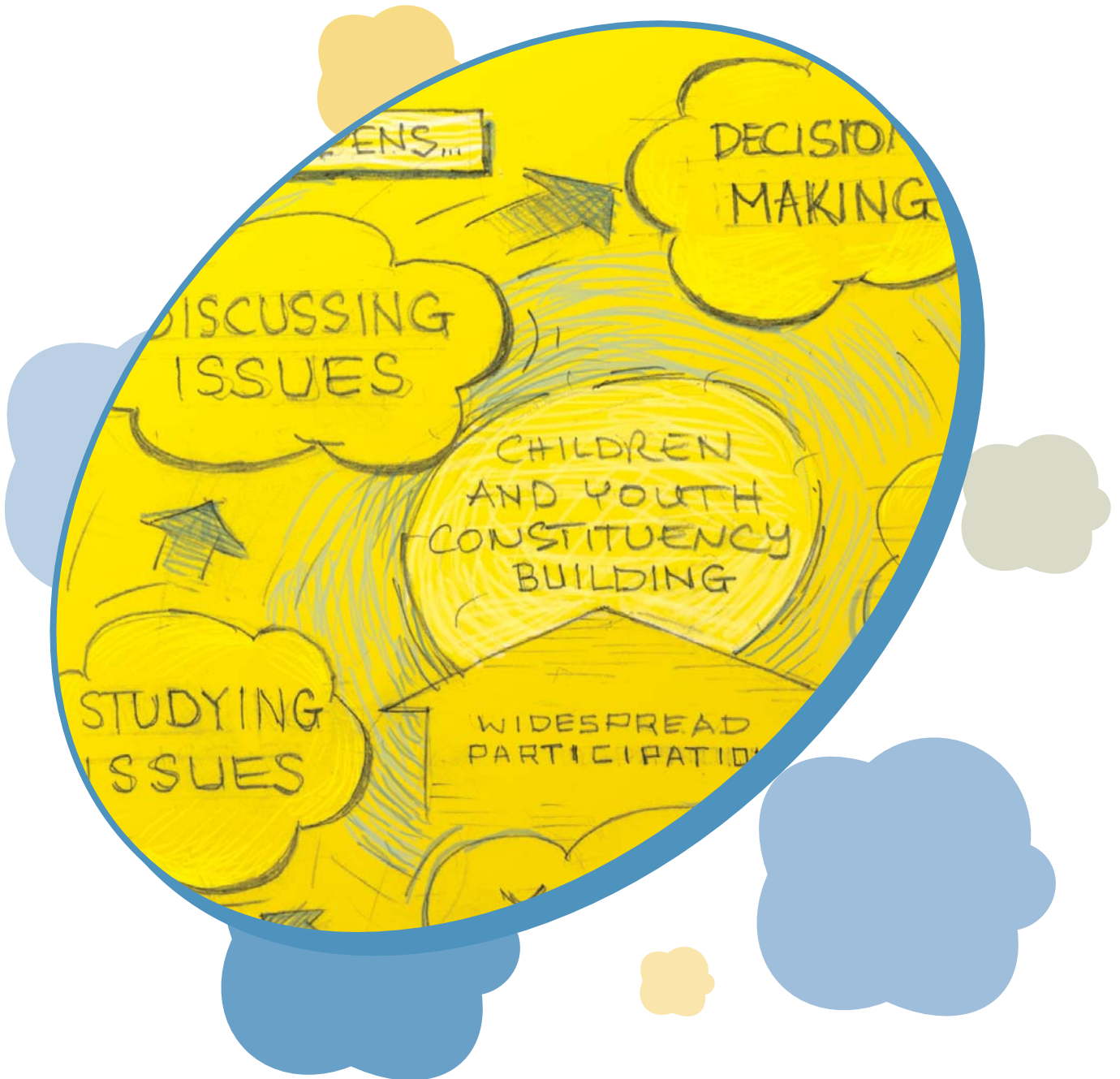




Let Discussion Guide us

Decision Making – How should children and youth participate in decisions about them?*



* Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



Where do we go in Canada to get the ideas of children and youth about decisions that affect them?

Many countries and regions already have a process or an infrastructure in existence, such as a national youth forum or youth parliament. See page 6 for examples of several models from around the world. Although Canada does not currently have a parallel or similar structure in place at a national level, there are many successful examples of the meaningful engagement of young people in decision making bodies at local, provincial, territorial and organizational levels. This guide will help lead a discussion about what might be put in place nationally to help ensure children and youth are meaningfully engaged in decision making.

In the summer of 2006 The Students Commission and the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, with our partners throughout Canada, were able to hire 18 youth summer staff with diverse backgrounds and experiences. They identified this as a project that interested them. The initial goal was to collect data from youth about the concept of a national youth body and to answer the question “is this something youth think is important and something that they want?” Since then, something more meaningful has occurred; young people have identified a desire to take a much more active role in helping explore the idea, promoting the concept to their friends, classmates, teachers and other youth. They are engaging more and more people in the discussion about the development of not just a body or group – but instead an infrastructure that will help ensure young people are able to participate in the studying of, talking about, and decision making on issues facing children and youth in Canada.

in·fra·struc·ture – *noun*

1. the basic, underlying framework or features of a system or organization.

– Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)

But it didn’t start just last year...these discussions have been long in the making...

TakingITGlobal, an international organization – led by youth and empowered by technology – in 2006 released *National Youth Councils: Their creation, evolution, purpose and governance*. The project tells the story of the presence, history, evolution, mandate, and purpose of National Youth Councils in 22 countries. This report has been very helpful in exploring various models of youth decision making and speaks to the interest and commitment of others to this topic.

Adults, organizations and youth have been talking about this idea for years at events, meetings and gatherings throughout Canada. In April 2007, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights in Canada released its report *Children: The Silenced Citizens*. Its first recommendation is that children’s input is given considerable weight when laws, policies and other decisions that have a significant impact on children’s lives are discussed or implemented at the federal level. This project is about giving children and youth a say about how this recommendation is implemented.

The moment is here for action.



Currently there is no place nationally where children and youth can represent themselves and inform decision-makers.

Ways to Participate

Young people, organizations and interested adults can help continue these exciting conversations across Canada. There are various ways you can support this initiative:



1. First of all – fill out the survey yourself online or on paper at the back of this guide. Filling out the survey helps prepare you to get excited about the idea, talk about it and promote it yourself! You might win an iPod just by filling out the survey! The survey is at www.engagementsurvey.ca
2. Use this “let DISCUSSION GUIDE us” booklet to host a discussion group at your school, organization or community group for youth, adults or both. Invite members of the community, volunteers, board members and young people to come and discuss young decision making and what something like this could look like. Send in the results.
3. Get your friends, parents, children, students, mentors, brothers and sisters, co-workers to visit the site and fill out the survey – or invite them to a discussion group!
4. If you work with young people, provide them a computer with internet access and encourage people (students, members, children, volunteers, participants) to fill out the survey! Inform young people that there are random draws for iPod Shuffles being conducted each month.
5. Whether you are young or adult, encourage adults (parents, colleagues, board members, family members, volunteers) to fill out the survey! Make sure adults know that they too are eligible to win the iPod Shuffles.
6. Send the link for the survey to your network and contacts and encourage them to participate. Sometimes letting them know you did it can help encourage them to participate as well!
7. Post a link to the survey on your website or personal networking site like myspace.com, [Facebook.com](http://facebook.com) or [MSN](http://msn.com). Post it on message boards, walls or other places where youth and adults can see it. Encourage others to pass it on.
8. Contact The Students Commission and Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (tgmag@tgmag.ca) or TakingITGlobal to have a team attend an event you are hosting to discuss the idea further, speak about the idea or provide promotional material to be distributed to youth and adults.
9. Identify and support youth and adults to take part in a national gathering to further explore the results of the survey and discussion groups and identify next steps – helping build and shape a meaningful process for youth decision making in Canada. Help plan the event, provide funding for a young person or adult to attend or volunteer to assist with the event – there are many ways to help! Register your interest for the event at www.tgmag.ca. You will be sent details on the location, date and cost.

SHARING IDEAS

Whether you do each question or focus on just a few, share the results of your discussions. Your input will help better our understanding of what young decision making might look like. Here are some additional ways to communicate what you have learned.

1. Write out the answers your group came up with for the specific questions on the back page, tear out the page and fax to Young Decision Makers: 1-416-597-0661.
2. Join our ongoing discussion group, “Young Decision Makers in Canada”. Visit <http://forums.engagementsurvey.ca> and you should find us. Sign up on the forums (it’s open to everyone) with a click of the mouse and then post your notes from your group there. If you are not a member of our forums already you can either quickly join (it’s free) or see if one of the members of the discussion group is. And we bet someone will raise their hand. (<http://forums.engagementsurvey.ca>)

OR

3. Email your notes to ydm@tgmag.ca, we will compile the results and post them on our website.

We are excited that people are talking about this idea – but it’s equally important to share your ideas and thoughts with others in Canada. Hopefully this will be an easy route to that.

YOUNG DECISION MAKERS

THE JOURNEY SO FAR...

YOUNG PEOPLE HELPING MAKE CHANGE FOR THE FUTURE

HOSTED NATIONAL GATHERINGS

- Increased child and youth participation
- Built connections between youth and youth-serving organizations
- Increased youth engagement in civic processes

PARTICIPATED IN AND PROMOTED INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE

- Supported youth representing Canadian views internationally
- Strengthened youth participation in formal decision making bodies
- Gathered information on youth involvement (i.e. Governance)
- Generated interest in national youth body
- Joined with new partners to explore decision making

PARTICIPATED IN AND PROMOTED DIALOGUE WITHIN CANADA

- Hosted 10 open forums – discussed National Youth Council
- Conferences, meetings and emails create greater interest and awareness around youth ideas
- Generated recommendations, ideas; identified challenges related to youth participation in decision making
- Authored “National Youth Councils...” report to share recommendations

YOUTH LEAD PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

- Utilizing ideas/learnings, youth helped create survey to gauge Canadian interest in idea of youth governance
- Youth involvement at all levels of research project ensured tools created were practical and meaningful to participants
- Research activities deepen connections with local youth and youth-serving organizations

ONGOING RESEARCH ACTIVITIES (2006 – 2007)

Sharing Ideas and Information:

- Shared information through meetings, discussion groups and participation in survey
- Shared youth decision making models and practices
- Gathered research data from partners (survey etc.)
- Continue to host national gatherings

Building Partner Networks:

- Promote youth/adult participation in survey
- Bring more interested partners on board
- Strengthen/formalize existing partnerships
- Create and communicate shared workplan
- Link to provincial youth networks
- Develop reporting processes
- Develop a discussion guide to further meaningful dialogue about child and youth decision making

Promoting Research Project:

- Develop Media Kit to promote research project
- Encourage organizations to take part in survey
- Encourage youth to talk about the idea of national youth councils and complete the survey

**CHILDREN:
THE SILENCED CITIZENS**
A CANADIAN SENATE
RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

– SURVEY –
FURTHER DISCUSSION AND
LEARNING TO DEVELOP
A MODEL

WHERE WE WANT TO GO



HOW IT HAPPENS....

- DISCUSSION GROUPS
- WORKSHOPS
- STUDENT ASSEMBLIES
- CONFERENCES
- REPRESENTATION - ELECTED/APPOINTED REPS (VIA TV OR RIDINGS, OR OTHER ORGS./LOCAL COUNCILS)
- WIDESPREAD PARTICIPATION
 - WEB/TV/PHONE/TEXT
 - REFERENDUMS
 - VOTES/POLLS
- INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY ORGS./PROGRAMS
- ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN PROGRAM/POLICY CREATION

Different Models

In Canada...

Futures in Newfoundland Youth (FINALY)

FINALY is a dynamic youth-driven organization that empowers youth to be active participants in decision making and implementation. Their involvement in social and economic issues provides an opportunity for youth to build a viable future in Newfoundland and Labrador. They consist of a provincial youth council of 13 with 3 democratically elected representatives from each of the four regions of Newfoundland and Labrador. FINALY has over 800 members aged between 15-30 who are supported by a staff of 2 full-time positions, with an additional 4-8 contracted employees. Best described in their own words,

- **WE ENCOURAGE SUCCESS** for youth through workshops that focus on skill development and idea generation
- **WE PROMOTE OPPORTUNITIES** for youth both in their local economic zone and throughout the province
- **WE CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS** by youth through the annual Provincial Youth of the Year Awards Program
- **WE COORDINATE PROJECTS** such as provincial and national conferences focusing on youth and community development
- **WE DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION** to youth throughout the province
- **WE HELP ESTABLISH** and maintain zonal youth councils, in partnership with Regional Economic Development Boards

WHY THEY DO IT

- **TO REPRESENT** youth in the province
- **TO ENCOURAGE** and **COORDINATE** youth involvement in the Regional Economic Development Process
- **TO PROVIDE** information through a support network for and concerning youth
- **TO PROMOTE** the achievements of youth in helping create a prosperous future in Newfoundland and Labrador
- **TO DEVELOP** pride in our heritage and culture in Newfoundland and Labrador

Source: Futures In Newfoundland and Labrador's Youth, "About Us" section, online at www.finaly.ca

City of Vancouver – Youth Outreach Team

In 1995, City Council approved a document called the Civic Youth Strategy (CYS). This document outlined recommendations for how the City could put youth "on the map" when it came to daily life in Vancouver.

The Civic Youth Strategy is a paper document stating that Vancouver's government is committed to working with youth and the community in general, to:

- ensure youth have "a place" in the City
- ensure a strong youth voice in decision making
- promote youth as a resource to the City
- strengthen the support base for youth in the City

The CYS also outlines a commitment to work in partnership with youth (ages 13-24) and the larger community. It includes an obligation to involve youth and youth organizations as active partners in the development, assessment and delivery of civic services that directly impact youth.

The Youth Outreach Team helps ensure that the CYS is a successful policy. Youth are hired as City staff, to make sure youth who live in Vancouver are involved in all aspects of the City, including the City's decision making processes. The Youth Outreach Team (YOT) is a model of youth engagement at a municipal level. Its mission aligns with the City's Civic Youth Strategy.

The Youth Outreach Team works on numerous activities each year, including a special ceremony, the COV Youth Awards which recognize the positive contributions of youth, adults, youth groups, programs and organizations in Vancouver. Vancouver has been committed to celebrating Youth Week since 1995. Youth Week has grown and developed ever since into an amazing city wide celebration involving over 23 community centres, 15 neighborhoods and youth organizations, and 40,000 youth each year! With the introduction of the COV Youth Awards as a feature event in 2005, local activities will now integrate with this signature civic event during Youth Week in Vancouver. Youth Week is an opportunity to highlight, showcase and encourage meaningful engagement of youth in civic activities.

Source: City of Vancouver Youth Outreach Team, "Who We Are" section, online at www.vancouveryouth.ca

In Latvia...

Latvia: Latvijas Jaunatnes padome (LJP)

History:

Latvia as a country regained its independence in 1991. Shortly before and after this time the youth organizations of the USSR collapsed and new non-governmental organizations emerged. It soon became obvious that in order to defend their interests better and promote youth policy in a broader arena, these organizations needed an umbrella organization. It was thus that the National Youth Council of Latvia (LJP) was established in 1992.

Membership and governance:

In 2006, the LJP comprises 40 member organizations, but the organization is rapidly growing by approximately five new organizations each year. There are two types of members: associate members and full members. Associate members are typically departments of bigger organizations; full members are youth organizations that are registered with the State's register. To become a member, organizations send their applications to the Board, which makes membership decisions. However, all decisions made by the Board must be approved by the General Assembly.

Work methodology:

In early 2006, the LJP was working with eight employees, seven of them under the age of 30. The number of Board members is exactly the same (eight in total and seven out of eight under 30 years). The LJP also works with a larger number of youth volunteers each year (around 20). In contrast to many other national youth councils, there is no secure funding base from state departments. The majority of funding comes in through the financing of projects.

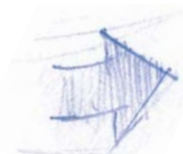
Areas of work:

The mission statement of the LJP is to improve the quality of life of young people in Latvia and represent their interests by promoting the importance of youth organizations and their development, cooperation, and involvement in social and political activities. The top four priority areas of work include non-formal education, information, developing LJP, and lobbying decision making. International cooperation is important for the LJP, although not as important as the national-level work. For example, it is represented in different working groups of several ministries and is also able to draft youth laws, which it then hands over to the parliament for approval.

Source: "National Youth Councils" report, online at <http://tig.phpwebhosting.com/clc/report/CLC-Report-2006.pdf>

See

National Youth Councils: Their creation, evolution, purpose and governance report from TakingITGlobal online at <http://tig.phpwebhosting.com/clc/report/CLC-Report-2006.pdf> (Report begins on page 206.)





Some Key Questions for Discussion

Have your ideas heard and help others ensure that everyone has a seat at the table in these exciting discussions.

1. In your community, do you think that there are enough outlets or opportunities for children and youth to say what they think or how they feel about decisions that are being made about their issues?
2. Do you believe there should be a national child and youth infrastructure created that allows young people to be heard by Canadians and the national government?
3. What should the role of this infrastructure be? What are five things it should do?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
4. How should the national infrastructure involve young people? For example, should it be representational (where a group of young people represent everyone) or participatory (everyone represents themselves, anyone and everyone can be involved)? Or a combination? How could this work?
5. How would young people become part of this infrastructure? Elected by adults or youth? Chosen by adults or youth? Chosen by organizations? Or local councils? Or anyone can join?
6. Would there be a certain number or limited number of representatives from each province/territory?
7. Would there be representatives from existing child and youth councils, advisory boards, child and youth organizations or other similar groups?
8. How would it be ensured that ideas from all sorts of young people were heard?
9. Are there certain groups of young people you think we need to make sure have the opportunity for participating?
10. How do you think decisions should be made by this group?
11. What would the structure be for leading the infrastructure? Would it look like our government system or something different?
12. What age of young people should this infrastructure represent? We are looking at focussing on young people, under the age of 18, because they do not have the right to vote. Do you agree or disagree with this focus? Yes/No? Please discuss.
13. Do you see a role for 18-24 year-olds? What would this look like?
14. What format would meetings of the youth body take and how often should they be held? Would there be meetings of everyone involved, just a select group, online meetings open to anyone?
15. What would the meetings accomplish?
16. Do you see a role for adults? What role would adults play?
17. If you are 18 and over are you willing to help move this project forward? If so, how?
18. Do you have other creative ideas to help encourage child and youth engagement and get young people involved in decision making in Canada?



A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Let DISCUSSION GUIDE us...

How should children and youth participate in decisions about them?

Thank you for helping host a discussion group to get people talking about the Young Decision Makers (YDM) project. We hope this easy-to-use form will help you record the outcomes of your discussions and share with us. You don't need to record everything – in fact it's really to sum up the overall feelings and ideas of the group.

You can visit <http://ydm.engagementcentre.ca> to post the outcomes online for others to see immediately or you can fax this page to 416.597.0661. Either way the opinions, thoughts and ideas coming out of your discussions will help guide this journey to a new and meaningful process that will support/allow for young people's participation in the decisions that affect their lives.

Your Name: _____

School / Organization Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Number of people in group: _____ Age range of participants _____

Is your community urban rural remote northern?

1. Does the group think that this is a good idea? Should there be something in place to help ensure young ideas in decision making processes?

Everyone agrees	Most agree	Some agree	Few agree	None agree
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4. Do you agree or disagree that the focus should be young people under 18? Yes or No? Why?

2. What are five things it should do?

A _____

B _____

C _____

D _____

E _____

5. What is the ideal make-up of the body – how is it run?

3. Were there any ideas about how best to make sure everyone is represented – from different provinces/territories, regions, language, gender etc.?

6. What role do you see for adults and older youth (over 18)?

7. Other comments you would like to make.

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement leads this project.

Key partners to date: The Students Commission, TakingITGlobal, Brock University, Youth Launch, the McCreary Centre Society and the City of Vancouver.