

Young Champions for Nature Summit

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Summary

On April 24th 2019, approximately 50 young Canadians between the ages of 14 and 30 gathered in Montreal to attend the Young Champions for Nature Workshop. This workshop was convened by Environment and Climate Change Canada in collaboration with Ocean Wise and Earth Rangers to engage youth on issues relating to terrestrial and marine conservation as part of the *Nature Champions Summit*. Participating youth were invited through a number of organizations, including:

- The United Nations Association in Canada (UNAC)
- Canada Conservation Core
- Ocean Bridge
- Canadian Wildlife Federation
- WE Charity
- Apathy Is Boring
- Student On Ice
- The World Economic Forum

The Workshop concluded with a Q and A session between youth and three leaders in the environment and conservation space - Minister Catherine McKenna, filmmaker Alexandra Cousteau, and National Geographic Explorer Dr. Enric Sala.

Workshop Results

During the workshop, young leaders explored how governments, non-profit and private organizations can better engage youth to address biodiversity loss, climate change and ocean health. The various topics explored included best practices for engaging youth on nature, barriers to youth engagement and solutions needed to overcome them, and examples of existing programs and initiatives that have already had success in getting young people involved in conservation action. To help frame the discussion, the workshop opened with presentations by two young leaders with experience in conservation - Cole Singleton (Earth Rangers) provided an overview of terrestrial conservation in Canada, and Cyrielle Noel (Ocean Wise) presented on ocean conservation.

The bulk of the workshop had young leaders participate in an interactive brainstorming exercise that included three parts:

- **Part 1:** Youth were asked to consider what values, practices and elements are most relevant to each age range, what barriers face youth and what are examples of programs that are making a difference now.
- **Part 2:** Youth were asked to discuss and explore key barriers to inclusive engagement and suggest solutions or mitigations.
- **Part 3:** Youth self identified with their areas or greatest interest (Terrestrial / Ocean / Environment) and discussed what existing programs are working now.

Part 1 – Values, Practices, and Elements

Youth working in mixed groups sequenced the **Values, Best Practices, and Program Elements** in order of significance for three age groups: children (under 12), adolescents (13-17 years old), and young adults (18-24 years old).

Values

Programs are more likely to engage youth if the following key values are met:

- **Transparency** – Canadian youth are savvy and quickly reject anything that is fake, over-packaged, and inauthentic or designed purely to sell. They crave truth and access and will forgive mistakes or missteps, as long as the responsible party takes action and admits the flaw.
- **Reinvention** – Youth are attracted to anything that is faster, more efficient or easier to use. They are comfortable with rapid change and often enjoy the acceleration of technological development. Their collective willingness to shift is simply a desire for reinvention – to find better ways to solve a problem and a strong social concern for meaningful change.
- **Connection** – They enjoy collaborative projects and gain profile by sharing information, rather than hoarding it.
- **Expression** – Youth believe that we all have something to say, to contribute, or shine in some unique way.

Best Practices

Many programs already exist that can offer insight or perspective for how to structure a program for youth engagement. This exploration of 'best practices' is essential to ensure the sustainability of youth programs.

- **Collaboration for Collective Impact** – Partnerships may be technical, strategic or financial. Mentorship may be peer-to-peer or intergenerational, and you can better engage youth by engaging their families too.
- **Social** – Provides youth with opportunities to share common experiences with other youth in a supportive environment, and in many cases also provides opportunities for youth to work collaboratively alongside adults and mentors.
- **Stewardship** – Encourage stewardship by providing youth with opportunities to develop a sense of ownership or agency by making meaningful and valuable contributions in their communities.
- **Nature-Urban Connection** – Encourage youth with opportunities to interact with nature within a built urban environment so they can make connections with nature within an urban setting.
- **Careers** – Engage youth by providing them mentorship and authentic career related experiences that can assist youth in considering future career options in an area of interest.
- **Sustainability and Viability** – Programs or projects that are viable, sustainable, have solid partnerships, and have the capacity to adjust to meet the changing needs of youth and the diversity among youth.

Overall, programs must clearly demonstrate the measurable impact youth are having on the natural world and provide participants with regular feedback.

Program Elements¹

Many programs already exist that offer insight on program elements that effectively promote youth engagement. An exploration of 'best practices' can offer insight directly from youth as to what organizations can do to ensure successful programs. Below are program elements and related definitions.

- **Recognition** – Youth benefit from recognition. By positive recognition of efforts, youth are incentivised to progress initiatives.
- **Adventure** – There's a premium placed on venturing into the world, collecting exotic adventures and memories, and pushing personal limits. Youth seek highly interactive encounters that teach and challenge while giving them personal insight, and an opportunity explore who they are.
- **Networks** – Youth embrace technology to build social and professional networks. The older youth are rejecting club-style memberships in favour of loose connections that more accurately reflect their interests, lifestyles and busy days.
- **Design** – The design of objects, places and things are increasingly important. Design is shifting paradigms and spurring people everywhere to rethink established products and industries. Design, along with its strategic twin, innovation, has become a vital tool to stand out and stay strong in an increasingly competitive market.
- **Editing** – In a world that is inundated with choices, editing is a critical market phenomenon and an important process in our daily lives. We all rely on trusted editors to sift through the raw data and identify the most relevant information.

¹ Adapted from the 2011 Canadian Parks Council report prepared by Apathy Is Boring

- **Peer-to-Peer** – They are suspicious of ordinary “push” campaigns and gravitate toward integrated, contextual offerings from trusted friends and members of their networks.
- **Collaboration** – The Connected Generation is aware of its growing ability to spark change. This awareness is spurring mass creativity and launching a power shift away from companies and into the hands of youth who enjoy working together to solve problems.
- **Bring it to Life** – Brand theatre allows groups of all kinds to create emotional connections with their constituencies or ‘tribe’ and users. It takes typical experiences a few steps forward by engaging the senses, the imagination and the spirit, and transforms routine into meaningful engagement.
- **Spirituality** – Increasingly, a meaningful life is being defined as a spiritual life, and spirituality has become a dominant public value. Younger generations have blurred the lines between secular and sacred, finding spirituality in all aspects of their lives.
- **Service** – There’s a new spirit of volunteerism in the air, led by a young, connected generation that has new ideas about how to give back. Today’s volunteers want to give their time and talent instead of simply writing a cheque.

Children (Under 12 years old)

Values	Best Practices	Program Elements
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connection 2. Reinvention 3. Expression 4. Transparency 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social 2. Stewardship 3. Careers 4. Nature Urban connection 5. Collaboration for collective impact 6. Sustainability & Viability 7. Peer to Peer 8. Editing 9. Service 10. Spirituality 11. Bring it to life 12. Networks 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adventure 2. Peer to peer 3. Collaboration 4. Recognition 5. Bring it to life 6. Design 7. Editing 8. Service 9. Networks 10. Spirituality

Adolescents (13-17 years old)

Values	Best Practices	Program Elements
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connection 2. Reinvention 3. Expression 4. Transparency 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social 2. Collaboration for collective impact 3. Stewardship 4. Sustainability and Viability 5. Careers 6. Nature Urban Connection 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognition 2. Networks 3. Collaboration 4. Adventure 5. Peer to peer 6. Service 7. Editing 8. Design 9. Spirituality

Values	Best Practices	Program Elements
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reinvention 2. Transparency 3. Connection 4. Expression 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Careers 2. Sustainability and Viability 3. Stewardship 4. Nature-Urban Connection 5. Collaboration for collaborative Impact 6. Adventure 7. Design 8. Networks 9. Recognition 10. Spirituality 11. Service 12. Bring to Life 13. Peer to peer 14. Editing 15. Social 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design 2. Peer to peer 3. Collaboration 4. Bring it to life 5. Spirituality 6. Networks 7. Recognition 8. Adventure 9. Editing 10. Services

Part 2 – Identifying Barriers

Youth were asked to discuss and explore key barriers to inclusive engagement and suggest solutions or mitigations.

Key challenger area	Barriers	Solutions
Lack of Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic and location factors preventing engagement • Lack/limited education/resources • Limited valued/paid youth leadership opportunities • High costs and limited funding • Explanation of Green Mentality • No time • Exhausting-a lack of support • Cultural • Gender Biases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Programs to allow greater engagement making recreational use of natural areas...more accessible. • Prioritize inclusivity. • Using already existing networks of youth to engage youth with relevant projects/programs • Meeting people where they are • Including in Education curriculum • Create safe entry points to engagement • More youth positions available • Grass root organizations • Unification of information facilitate the research
Disconnected with Conservation/ Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatable-Achievable(relative) • Lack of youth voices in institutions, governments for environmental decisions • Disconnect to the environment (especially in urban areas) • Lack of agricultural value, viewed negatively & farmers less valued • Not enough funds (students) • Lack of advertisement for environmental programs/activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities to get involved-start at a young age ex. Camp, programs, art etc. • Inspire through tangible impact for an individual's action • Sustainable economies • Instilling the knowledge, desire and ability in youth to make a difference! Necessary in curriculum • Sustainable economies • Intergenerational events, storytelling (similar to this event) • Land based learning • Indigenous education
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge (details) • Lack of interest • Lack of opportunity to learn about the environment • Not enough funding for environmental programs/activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data that youth can comprehend • Integrate environmental matters into the curriculum • Hands on experiences that allow students to be a part of progress and receive results • Government funding • Innovative ways of teaching

Part 3 – Best Practices

Youth self identified their areas or greatest interest (Terrestrial / Ocean / Environment) and discussed what existing programs are working now.

Age Group	Marketing/communications	Awareness/ Digital content	Engagement Multi hour	Immersion Multi Day	Ambassadorship	Professional Life
Children (under 12 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4Ocean • Be Plastic Wise • Voice for the planet.org 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecteurs en herbe • La planète s'invite à l'école/ à l'université • Blue planet • Chasing Corals (etc) • Nat Geo • Viral Videos • CPMA de Cozumel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bourse du carbone scol'ere • Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup • Aquariums • Surfrider • Ducks unlimited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRACKS – Trent university land-based cross-cultural and science program • Camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apathy is Boring: RISE Ambassador Program • Outward bound • Scouts and Girl guides • School ECO Clubs • TreesCO2 SAP – Student Ambassador Program 	
Adolescents (13-17 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blue dot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • La planète s'invite à l'école/ à l'université • I-naturalist • ebird • Canada Target one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSRS • Earth Rangers in schools Surfrider • Local wildlife.org • Aquavan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students on Ice expeditions (SOI) • Camp-canoe tripping • Discovery Rangers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YMCA-C-Vert • Coalition WILD ambassador program • Oceans Ambassadors (UK) 	
Young adults (18-24 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth4Nature • Global campaign • Be Plastic Wise • Coral Restoration Foundation (multiple projects) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup • DSF, social media campaign • #MyOntario is open for Ontario's ESA Review • Merchants of the Wild 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environnement jeunesse (ENJEU) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native Montreal: land based project • Global affairs Canada (IYIP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ocean Bridge • Apathy is Boring: RISE Ambassador Program • CWF CCC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • ENGSOs • Private Government • UN Green Corps • ACNU • Ocean Bridge • Canadian Cons. Corps • Canada Service Corps. • Greenworks • Eco Canada • Canada Youth jobs • Youth for Wildlife

Nature Talk Town Hall

The workshop concluded with an interactive Q and A session that provided youth the opportunity to engage directly with three leaders in the environment and conservation space - Minister Catherine McKenna, Alexandra Cousteau, and Dr. Enric Sala. The session was moderated by Chúk Odenigbo, a youth representative from Ocean Bridge. During the Q and A session, the three leaders drew from their experience and spoke to the importance of youth action on nature, and took the opportunity to ask youth questions about their priorities and ideas related to ambitious action on nature.

“The opportunity is clear. Canada has a role to play for the world. C’est vraiment un grand opportunité.”

-Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change

“This is the moment. As much as we need the political leaders, we need you because you will inherit the mess.”

-Enric Sala, National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence

“I think that the time has come for us, to change the frame on how we see the future.”

-Alexandra Cousteau, Explorer and Ocean Advocate

The Q and A session can be viewed [here](#).

Conclusion

Overall, discussions among youth participants during the Young Champions for Nature Workshop revealed a number of important messages that can be broadly organized in relation to three key questions around youth engagement on nature:

Why is engaging youth important?

- Youth do not have a choice when taking action on nature conservation. If action on nature conservation stagnates, it will affect the lives of youth today, and generations to come. Therefore, youth must be involved in solutions to issues presented.
- Youth will continue to speak truth to power, and are not afraid to give pragmatic and fearless advice. This it intended to assist efforts by governments, non-profits and private entities to take action on terrestrial and marine conservation.
- Finally, youth worldwide are at the front lines of action on conservation – as demonstrated by recent global initiatives, and innovative solutions spearheaded by youth and developed to combat losses in biodiversity and nature. Youth continue to be an innovative resource to draw from to find solutions.

How do you improve youth engagement efforts?

- Youth are diverse, and represent a variety of perspectives. It is important to recognize differences between youth e.g. urban/rural perspectives, cultural backgrounds etc. and barriers that may exist, to improve consultation and engagement.
- Engagement must be intergenerational. Youth respect the opinions of elders, and want to engage in a sustained dialogue with persons of all ages. As such, these conversations must see all perspectives heard and understood, without imbalances of power to continue to be productive.
- Finally, efforts to engage youth on nature conservation must be youth-led. Although efforts will require support from persons of all ages, youth must be present and meaningfully engaged.

What needs to happen next to empower youth?

- Youth continue to be the leaders of today – not tomorrow, and have a desire and a commitment to work with decision makers in various roles to ensure effective action on conservation.
- Youth are ready to come to the table with decision-makers and wish to have an equal voice during these conversations.
- To accomplish this, youth require opportunities be presented to fulfil ambitious ideas, and continued action on nature preservation – whether this be invitations to summits, service or employment opportunities, or funding to build solutions to problems.

Five ‘Youth Ambassadors’ selected to represent the diverse voices of Canadian youth were invited to attend the high-level segment of the Nature Champions Summit on April 25. During the Summit, the Ambassadors had the opportunity to communicate key messages from the Young Champions for Nature Workshop with a diverse group of representatives involved in advancing global conservation efforts, including ministers, business leaders and investors, Indigenous leaders, and other high-level representatives from international organizations, charities, and foundations.