

# Principles of Meaningful Youth Engagement

A reference for community partners and adult supports working with youth on the North Shore



Prepared by BUNYAAD Public Affairs and McCreary Centre Society for the Youth-Friendly North Shore initiative.

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Public Safety  
Canada

Sécurité publique  
Canada



Skwxwú7mesh  
Úxwumixw  
Squamish Nation



Tsleil-Waututh Nation  
PEOPLE OF THE INLET



We thank all the youth who shared their perspectives in this year's WelcoME activities, and for their interest in helping to shape a more youth-friendly North Shore.

We are also grateful to the North Vancouver School District and West Vancouver School District for supporting student engagement in WelcoME.

We respectfully acknowledge the original Peoples of the lands and waters that situate and surround us wherever we work. We honour the səliilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), on whose territories we work, play and live. We extend our gratitude and raise up their ongoing relationship with land they have stewarded since time immemorial. As well, we recognize Métis Nation BC, Inuit and urban Indigenous Peoples who have deeply rooted relationships with the land we all call home.

**Meaningful youth engagement is:** *“The meaningful participation and sustainable involvement of youth in shared decisions in matters which affect their lives and those of their community, including planning, decision making, and program delivery.”*  
(McCreary Centre Society, 2009)

Informed by the voices of youth who participated in the Youth-Friendly North Shore WelcoME program, the following principles outline what youth people may need in order to be meaningfully engaged in shaping the community around them.

### **A CLEAR ROLE AND PURPOSE**

Youth should clearly understand why they are being engaged, what is being asked of them, and how their input will be used to influence change. If their role is too vague or unclear, youth may be unsure how and what to contribute, feel their involvement is tokenistic, or disengage altogether.

### **CHOICE AND AUTONOMY**

Youth should have options in how they participate, including the types of activities, the method of engagement (e.g., in person or online, through surveys, one on one or in a group, through art), and what they choose to share. Having choice can build youth’s sense of agency, support diverse needs and comfort levels, and reduce barriers for youth who may be hesitant to engage.

### **TO BE HEARD**

Youth should have opportunities to voice their perspectives and be taken seriously in doing so. They should also be able to know and see how and where their input has contributed to shaping policies and priorities, and led to tangible change.

### **TO FEEL SAFE**

Youth are able to meaningfully engage in activities when the space, people, and systems around them support their safety and well-being. This includes their physical safety, like ensuring a space is free from physical hazards, and set up in a way that is appropriate for the needs of youth. It also includes their psychological safety, and feeling they are respected, that a space is inclusive, and they have the supports they need to care for their emotional well-being.

## PUTTING THESE PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Youth on the North Shore offered the following suggestions for how these principles could be implemented to support meaningful youth engagement in community-based settings.

***Plan with youth, not for them.*** Where possible, involve youth in designing the engagement opportunity, including identifying formats, activities, and desired outcomes. For example, a community centre interested in developing a youth-specific space or program could engage a group of youth to design and lead conversations with peers, then provide ongoing input into the centre or program design.

***Remove barriers to participation.*** Consider and aim to reduce the barriers youth may face to participating, including transportation, financial, timing, and support needs. Resources may be limited, so working with youth to identify barriers and come up with strategies to overcome them may lead to creative solutions while still respecting resource constraints. For example, if a youth is unable to physically travel to a space, providing other ways of sharing their perspectives (e.g., in writing, a one-to-one Zoom meeting) can ensure they have an opportunity to share their perspectives.

***Create a safe and comfortable space.*** Consider the physical or digital space where youth are meeting, and whether it is accessible for youth's physical, sensory, or other support needs; comfortable, including the seating and lighting; and welcoming, including whether it reflects the diversity of the youth involved. Providing food and passive activities, like colouring, can also help youth feel more comfortable settling into a space.

***Be transparent about scope.*** Being clear with youth about what is within their scope to influence can help set realistic expectations for how their ideas can be acted upon, and build trust between youth and supportive adults.

***Support ongoing reflection and improvement.*** Throughout an activity or initiative, provide opportunities for youth to share feedback on what is working well and what could be improved to better support their meaningful engagement. Regularly evaluating and adjusting the approach or activities can ensure they continue to meet the needs and interests of the youth involved.

## CONTINUUM OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The following continuum identifies various roles youth may have in engagement activities. The role youth have may depend on the nature of the engagement and the context in which it's happening, and youth may hold different roles at different points in an engagement activity. Youth may be most meaningfully engaged when they are involved, collaborate, and lead activities.

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	LEAD
Youth receive information about decisions made by adults.	Youth are asked for their views and ideas, and adults make decisions.	Youth contribute their voice throughout the process with some influence on decisions.	Youth and adults work together and share decision-making.	Youth lead the process, and adults provide support and resources.

*Adapted from the Government of British Columbia's [Youth Engagement Toolkit](#).*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources share information, guidance, and activities to meaningfully engage youth.

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION	LINK
Youth Engagement Toolkit (Government of BC)	An in-depth guide co-created by youth that shares information and practical strategies for engaging youth.	<a href="#">Youth Engagement Toolkit</a>
Engaged and Heard! (UNICEF)	Guidelines to support youth participation and engagement in civic activities.	<a href="#">Engaged and Heard!</a>
WelcoME Youth Action Team Community Review Tool	A tool for youth to reflect on the youth-friendliness of public spaces and programs, and provide recommendations for improvement.	<a href="#">WelcoME Youth Action Team Community Review Tool</a>



YFNS@BUNYAAD.CA