

DECLARATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

On The Ethical Engagement of
Young People and Adults in Canadian Organizations

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The Declaration of Accountability On The Ethical Engagement of Young People and Adults in Canadian Organizations may be downloaded free of charge from <http://www.fncaringsociety.com>

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Thank you to the individuals who participated in the written survey consultation. Comments provided by participants in the survey consultation have been included, as quotes, within the document to highlight key themes. In order to protect their privacy and anonymity they are not listed but to those who participated please accept our sincere thanks for your invaluable contribution.

BACKGROUND

In the late 1990's, the Centre for Organisation, Research and Education (CORE) Network of Indigenous Children, in Manipur, India, developed *Ethical Guidelines for Child and Youth Participation*. These guidelines were developed to support the involvement of children and young people in the organization as well as support them in speaking to their experiences, as Indigenous children and youth, in a country where speaking up could and frequently was met by armed conflict. As a part of a reflective and evolving process to assist children and youth in becoming safely engaged in change processes, CORE developed a framework to guide participation while safeguarding the wellbeing of children and youth. The CORE guidelines have formed the basis for a reflection on the participation and engagement processes occurring in Canadian organizations. While the threat of violence in response to public participation is minimal in Canada, there are times when the physical and psychological exclusion of children and young people continue despite efforts to engage children and youth respectfully and meaningfully in research, organizations, governance, and volunteer activities. Through a partnership with several prominent national non-profit organizations, youth representative organizations and passionate individuals we undertook a process to explore the roles and responsibilities of young people and adults in youth engagement. This document provides a first step in an evolving reflective process in Canada on the experience of child and youth engagement and the role of relationship-building in supporting past, present and future leaders.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Declaration of Accountability On The Ethical Engagement of Young People and Adults in Canadian Organizations is a tool to assist organizations that are currently engaging with young people and those that are beginning the process to reflect on their organization's structures, culture and capacity - both human and financial - to respectfully engage with young people. This is a tool to assist young people in determining if the organization, or activity, they are engaged in meets their needs effectively, respectfully and meaningfully.

SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPLES

Youth Engagement is Not a Program

Youth engagement should be viewed as a natural way of working in the organization rather than as a special program.

Contributions Match the Organization

Young people and adults who are working with an organization should be recruited for their knowledge, skills, interests and commitment to the organizational mission.

One Person Cannot Represent the Many

A young person should not be considered “the youth voice” at the table – it should be acknowledged that everyone at the table brings different perspectives to the issue.

Debate as a Learning Tool

Debate is a key element of personal and organizational growth.

Dignity and Safety

Under no circumstances should young people or adults in the workplace feel that placing themselves in an emotionally, spiritually, physically or cognitively unsafe space is expected or required by the organization.

Avoiding False Expectations

It is important to be honest about the changing role of youth within an organization including recognizing that there are limitations that correspond to age, experience, education and training.

Balance and Accessibility

As part of the development of the working relationship comes the understanding that most people require workplace accommodations to support them in making the optimal contribution to the organization – including young people

*I am a leader today not
just a leader of tomorrow
~Jocelyn Formsma*



PREAMBLE

Increasing numbers of national non-profit organizations are engaging young people as advisors, staff, volunteers and leaders since the United Nations 1985 International Youth Year and the integration of child participation in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Canadian organizations have made advances in engaging children and young people in all areas from programming through to governance. However, the success of these efforts varies widely, and although there are some positive examples of youth engagement in national non-profit organizations, there have also been times when young people have not felt respected or included.

There are also many organizations that would like to respectfully engage young people but are not sure how to do it in a meaningful way. This declaration sets out a foundation for respectfully engaging young people and adults in national non-profit organizations. The series of *Principles* and *Reflective Statements* have been designed to inform the active development of relationships between young people, adults and the organizations that have brought them together.

This is a tool to assist organizations that are currently engaging with youth and those that are beginning the process reflect on their organizations structures, culture and capacity - both human and financial - to respectfully engage with young people. This is also a tool to assist young people to determine if the organization, or activity, they are engaged in meets their needs effectively, respectfully and meaningfully. Ultimately, true youth engagement depends on the environment in which it operates, the supports available to sustain it, and requires that youth and adults to be actively engaged together.¹

To take it one step further, for young people and adults, it is a way to be mutually accountable to each other, developing the capacity to undertake the cross-generational mentoring process that inevitably occurs when youth and adults partner to achieve a common goal. Cross-generational mentoring facilitates the flow of information in a way that shapes mutual learning and growth for young people and adults.

Young people have an integral role in Canadian society as evidenced by the strength of the youth engagement movement. Canada has made national and international commitments to the rights of children and youth with particular attention on youth participation as set forth in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and *A Canada Fit for Children*. Ultimately, engagement of young people and adults is about developing relationships that value diverse perspectives and that support the growth of both the individuals as well as organizations.

There is a growing body of research and resources on the inclusion of young people in organizations, in conducting research (as researchers as well as subjects) and in their civic engagement in their communities. The following is only a brief list of the many organizations pioneering research in this field: *The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement*, *the McCreary Youth Foundation*, *the Laidlaw Foundation*, and *Save the Children Canada*. These organizations provide invaluable resources on engagement tools, strategies, benefits, challenges and successes of working in partnership with young people and adults. However, the value added of this declaration is to set in place the foundational principles upon which these tools and resources can be implemented.

¹ Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

This *Declaration* aims to be a catalyst for growth in the youth engagement movement by establishing *Principles* that adults and youth involved in organizations can use to measure their evolving commitment and readiness to respectfully and meaningfully engage with each other. Furthermore, individuals, agencies and organizations are encouraged to commit, publicly, to the *Principles*. The public declaration will serve as a reminder to young people, staff, and the community that the organization is committed to an on-going process of youth engagement and participation.

PROCESS FOR REVIEWING THE PRINCIPLES & REFLECTIVE STATEMENTS

After reading the *Principles*, review the *Reflective Statements*. If you and the youth engaged in your organization are working within this model, you are ready to sign the *Declaration*.

If you are unable to say “Yes” to all of the statements, feel uncertain, or have received feedback from youth or adults in your organization to the contrary, review the *Principles*, talk to your staff and volunteers, and begin the courageous conversation for change. Once you are able to say “Yes”, you are ready to publicly declare your commitment.

By signing onto the *Declaration*, you express your leadership and agree to monitor your progress and model continued growth through conversation, debate and improving on your ability to effectively and meaningfully engage young people and adults in the organization.

PRINCIPLES

Principle 1 Youth Engagement Is Not A Program

Young people in Canada make significant contributions to society in the form of volunteer work, employment and by providing a unique perspective on society. Worldwide, young people have been the source of many of the most important social movements and thus it is critical for the wellbeing of us all that national organizations support, nurture and respectfully engage with young people. As the contributions of young people can enhance all levels of the organization’s work, youth engagement should be viewed as a natural way of working in the organization versus as a special program.

Reflective Statements

- Our organization and our staff have begun a conversation with young people in our organization about the barriers to their participation and we have taken the necessary steps to address those barriers. This conversation will be ongoing as needs evolve.
- Our board of directors has passed a resolution or motion that clearly expresses the organization’s understanding of the value of youth engagement and has an organizational commitment to support youth engagement.
- We encourage debate and conversation, in a respectful way, and incorporate what we hear from our staff, volunteers and directors, regardless of age.
- We have reflected upon the principles of engagement and how they are, or are not, applied within our organization, and are constantly working towards ensuring that the principles are upheld.

Principle 2 Contributions Match the Organization

Youth and adults who are working with an organization should be recruited for their knowledge, skills, interests and commitment to the organizational mission - not on the basis of age alone. Employees and volunteers are much less likely to feel tokenized if the organization's work lies within their personal knowledge and interest areas.

Reflective Statements

- ☐ Our organization has engaged, and will continue to engage, young people and adults and respect their contributions not because of their age but because of their knowledge, skills and interests.
- ☐ All staff, adults and young people, working in the organization understand how they can contribute to the organizational mission.
- ☐ We have clearly defined policies and procedures for assessing the suitability of staff and volunteers to the organization.
- ☐ We have professional development plans for adults and youth, staff and volunteers, within the organization.
- ☐ Our organization celebrates success when adults and young people work together to achieve positive results.

Principle 3 One Person Cannot Represent the Many

All members of an organization bring a particular identity and perspective, but people who come from unique cultural groups or life experiences should not be asked to speak on behalf of that group. For example, a young person should not be considered "the youth voice" at the table – everyone's voices at the table should be acknowledged as bringing different perspectives to the issue. Diversity of voice is integral to the growth of inclusion and engagement within organizations.

Reflective Statements

- ☐ Our organization has a clearly identified policy where no one person will be asked to represent the voice of other members of a group they may be affiliated with.
- ☐ Our organization has a clear statement that the views of young people are welcome in all issues respecting the organization (except in matters that are clearly stated).
- ☐ Our organization has a clear statement that the views of adults are welcome in all issues respecting the organization in discussions involving young people (except in matters that are clearly stated).
- ☐ Our organization has identified a network of organizations that can provide and enhance our capacity to represent the many voices of youth and adults who are engaged in our organization.
- ☐ We have identified ourselves as an organization to our networks that can be called upon to assist and speak to issues of relevance to our mandate.

Principle 4 Debate as a learning tool

Debate and critical analysis are key elements of a learning organization and personal growth. Debate and critical analysis of issues and organizational approaches, conducted in a safe and respectful way, challenges assumptions, builds on the experiences of experts and advocates and provides solutions to identified barriers to inclusion and engagement.

Reflective Statements

- Our organization has a way of describing how it learns and we are able to communicate this clearly to adults and young people within and outside of the organization.
- Our organization has a way of gathering and analyzing challenging ideas, and emerging research etc., that are different from those held by the organization.
- Our organization clearly articulates to staff and volunteers that their suggestions and ideas are welcome – including those that may challenge organizational understandings and ways of working. If there are limits on this, these limits are made clear to everyone in the organization.
- Our organization has developed a procedure for responding to the suggestions or ideas of employees and volunteers.

Principle 5 Dignity and Safety

Under no circumstance should young people or adults in the workplace feel that placing themselves in an emotionally, spiritually, physically or cognitively unsafe space is expected or required by the organization. This includes, but is not limited to, 1) sharing personal experiences; 2) unsafe working conditions; 3) expectations to take on more responsibility than the person is capable of managing; and 4) exposure to traumatic situations without adequate training or support. Although many organizations are very thoughtful when it comes to these matters there have, unfortunately, been times when well-meaning young people and adults have placed other young people in situations that have been unsafe often because the potential consequences have not been thoroughly examined.

i. Sharing personal stories

The dignity and safety of individuals who are sharing personal information will be protected. Sharing of personal experiences will be the choice of the storyteller. No person should feel obligated to share a personal story either as a way of being heard or to make broad-based change. Sharing a personal story must include the recognition of the possible consequences for the storyteller and his or her family and friends. These impacts can be short and long term and may offset any potential benefits for the organization. Although it is true that sharing personal stories can change an individual's point of view, it is rare that it leads to systemic change. Therefore, the use of personal stories is reserved for audiences who can respectfully hear the story and have the power to implement change - this is rarely the case in conference settings, for example. The motives of both the storyteller and the organization will be made clear and be discussed ahead of time. Measures are in place to support the storyteller before, during and after the sharing of personal experiences. Storytellers are more than their "one" experience and are recognized as such.

ii. Workplace safety

Young people and adults working in organizations should be fully briefed on workplace safety standards and possible hazards in keeping with workplace safety laws and regulations. This information should include: 1) how to identify and report unsafe situations; 2) the right not to work in unsafe conditions or operate unsafe equipment; and 4) safety procedures in the event of an emergency.

iii. Non discrimination and harassment

Young people and adults should be fully briefed on workplace standards and procedures to address workplace discrimination and harassment. It is particularly important to let young people know that harassment or discrimination of any kind is not allowed in the workplace. This includes, but is not limited to, discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, gender, disability, religion and sexual orientation. All employees and volunteers must be advised on how to report and get redress for incidents of discrimination or harassment.

iv. Exposure to traumatic situations or events

Special care and attention should be paid to ensure that adults and young people are not exposed to traumatic situations or events that are beyond their level of training or personal ability to manage. It is important that all employees and staff working in settings where traumatic events are possible are fully briefed on protocols for addressing traumatic situations and the supports provided by the organization before, during and after the crisis.

Reflective Statements


- Our organization has clearly defined policies on workplace safety and discrimination/harassment that are presented in a form that everyone in the organization (staff and volunteers) are able to access and understand.
- Our policies on workplace safety have special considerations for the safety and wellbeing of young people.
- Our organization has a policy that clearly states that adults and young people should not be asked to publicly share personal stories in any way without full disclosure of the possible risks including, but not limited to:
 - Possible personal trauma associated with sharing a difficult life experience across their life stages (e.g.: sharing something in video when you are young may cause you difficulty when you are an adult).
 - Negative impact on family or friends.
 - Being identified for one experience in their life (i.e., a sexual abuse victim) versus as a whole person.
 - Duty to report if the situation involves a crime or safety risk to a young person or other members of the public.
 - Liability if others cited in the story disagree that the content is a true telling of events.
- We have discussed the sharing of personal experiences as one tool in the change process and have ensured everyone in the organization, including young people, understand the limits and benefits of sharing personal stories.

Principle 6 *Avoiding False Expectations*

It is important to be honest about the changing role of youth within an organization including recognizing that there are limitations that correspond to age, experience, education and training. For example, some opportunities may be provided to youth only and are not open in the same way to adults or there may be different standards of qualifications for summer students acting in a particular role and full time staff. An open, honest and clear conversation with young people about these limitations is important. It is also important for young people to realize that as they transition to adulthood, qualifications for career positions will change and they must be provided the guidance and support to continue their education, and grow into different positions, as appropriate.

Reflective Statements

- Our organization has activities or processes that require specific levels of education, training or experience that are clearly articulated.
- If our organization provides unique mentoring opportunities for youth that expose them to activities or opportunities normally only available to people with specialized training or experience, we have clearly identified the levels of training/experience a young person would need to pursue to make this a viable career option.
- Our organization only engages youth to a certain age or within a certain age range, and we have clearly articulated our reasons for doing so.
- Our organization actively supports young people in their education by providing flexible work/volunteer hours and providing them with credit for their work so that they can include it in a resume.
- Our organization has policies in place to assist young people with their transition to adulthood within the organization and as they transition out of the organization.



“Respect is reflected in thought, spoken word, and actions of a person or group that looks out for the betterment of others. It requires equality, balance, awareness, and acknowledgement from an individual without bias or prejudice.”

Principle 7 Balance and Accessibility

As part of the development of the working relationship comes the understanding that most people require workplace accommodations to support them in making the optimal contribution to the organization – including young people. These accommodations for young people may mean flexible meeting times, transportation and support for youth before, during and after their time at the organization. Accommodations for young people should be viewed as comparable to those made for adults in an organization. Many organizations have accommodations for employees and volunteers to assist them in making the maximum contribution to the organization (e.g.: flexible working hours, working from home, educational leave). A discussion about meeting the needs of the organization, and of the youth, involves concrete and measurable goals that are positive and possible.

Reflective Statements

- Our organization works with young people to identify any accommodations that can be made within the organization to support them in reaching their maximum potential.
- Our organization has a policy that volunteers, particularly young people, do not have to pay out of pocket to conduct their volunteer activities – including transportation to and from the workplace.
- Our organization has a policy of meeting with young people to ensure that activities and hours of work are structured in a way that supports their education and healthy development along with ensuring that they have enough time for family and recreation.
- Our organization has a policy to support the participation of persons with disabilities and this has been shared with young people in the organization.

SELF-MONITORING

Because this initiative has been established by a Working Group of organizations there is no formal monitoring body. The action of publicly declaring your commitment is for the benefit of all members of Canadian society and the onus to maintain the integrity of the commitment is the responsibility of each signing organization. This tool opens the door for any individual, regardless of age, to hold their organization accountable and find opportunities to strive for excellence in youth engagement.

DECLARATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY ²

Agencies, organizations and individuals that adopt the *Declaration of Accountability On The Ethical Engagement of Young People and Adults* in Canadian Organizations may be added to the list on the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society website by completing the registration form at www.fncaringsociety.com or by faxing back the following statement to (613) 230-3080. For more information contact:

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society
1001-75 Albert St. Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7 ph: 613.230.5885
email: youthengagement@fncfcs.com

Our [name of organization] commits to the *Ethical Engagement of Young People and Adults in Canadian Organizations* as its public promise to excellence in youth engagement. The [name of organization] confirms it has read the *Preamble, Principles* and reviewed the *Reflective Statements* to a degree that acknowledges a high level of agreement with the *Principles*. In so doing, we commit to exercising due care concerning the inclusion of personal storytelling, balancing life needs and expectations and supporting staff, youth and volunteers through respectful engagement. Our organization, to the best of our ability, will adhere to the *Principles* as set forth in the *Declaration of Accountability*. It is hereby confirmed that each member of the organization and governing body has received a copy of the *Declaration of Accountability* and that a copy will be provided to each person who participates in our organization as a board member, staff or volunteer.

Organizational Representative: _____

Witnessed: _____

POSTING

Show your support for the *Declaration of Accountability* by posting the following notice on your website.

We, [name of organization], have endorsed the *Declaration of Accountability* and we encourage other organizations to support the evolving process of youth engagement and participation by endorsing the *Declaration of Accountability*. Visit www.fncaringsociety.com for more information.

² This Declaration was modeled after The Ethical Fundraising and Financial Accountability Code created by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy. Retrieved April 4, 2006 from http://www.imaginecanada.ca/page.asp?ethical_fundraising

RESOURCES

This is not an exhaustive list of resources on youth engagement, however, it does provide links to resources that will assist your organization continue to provide quality support to staff, volunteers, youth and adults.

ARTICLES AND REPORTS

Blackstock, C., Cross, T., George, J., Brown, I., & Formsma, J. (2006). *Reconciliation in child welfare: Touchstones of hope for Indigenous children, youth, and families*. Ottawa, ON, Canada: First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada. Retrieved April 4, 2006 from <http://www.reconciliationmovement.org>.

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WEBSITES

Canada 25

<http://www.canada25.com/collateral/Canada25%20Civic%20Engagement%20Issues%20Framework.pdf>

Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

<http://www.tgmag.ca/centres/>

The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

<http://www.casott.on.ca/>

Child Welfare League of Canada

<http://www.cwlc.ca>

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

<http://www.fncaringsociety.com>

Laidlaw Foundation

<http://www.laidlawfdn.org/cms/>

McCreary Youth Foundation

<http://www.myfoundation.ca/transitions-program.html>

National Children's Alliance

<http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.com/nca/index.htm>

National Youth In Care Network

<http://www.youthincare.ca>

Reconciliation in Child Welfare for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families

www.reconciliationmovement.org

Save the Children Canada

<http://www.savethechildren.ca/wherewework/canada/index.html>

Taking It Global

<http://www.takingitglobal.org/themes/mdg/youthinpolicy.html>


United Nations Association in Canada

<http://www.unac.org>

Youth Engagement and Voice

<http://www.youthengagementandvoice.org/index.cfm?menuCat=2>





*“If I am committed to youth engagement,
I am committed to a relationship that
goes beyond a project or a program.”*