



Toronto City Planning

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Getting involved in City Planning



We want to make Toronto the most engaged city on planning issues in all of North America. That's the goal of *Growing Conversations*, a project to improve engagement across the City Planning Division. We know that achieving that goal means doing a better job of reaching youth, newcomers and renters—groups that are often underrepresented in conversations with City Planning. This Youth Engagement Strategy is one important step towards achieving that goal.

Toronto City Planning Youth Engagement Strategy

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WHY A YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY?

Youth aged 18–30 are an important segment of Toronto’s population. In some parts of the city, they are the fastest-growing demographic group, and they are often drivers of economic and employment growth.

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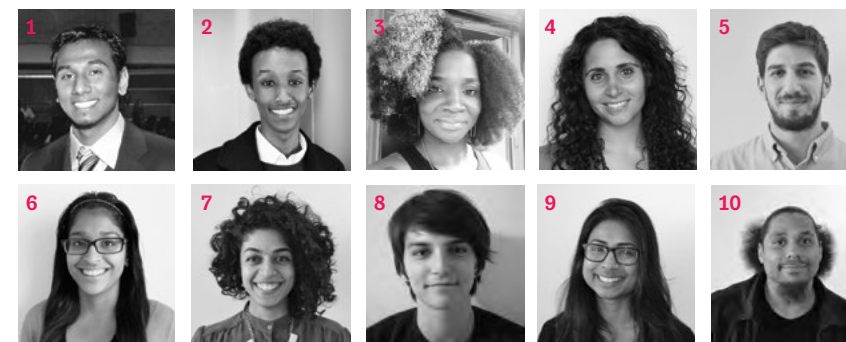
Yet the voices of youth are often missing in Toronto’s planning processes, where homeowners over the age of 55 typically dominate the conversation. The *Youth Engagement Strategy* aims to bring more youth voices into city planning conversations by:

- » Understanding how and when to engage youth on city planning issues; and,
- » Creating a framework that will mobilize a generation to take ownership of and become active on planning issues.

DEVELOPING THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The **Youth Engagement Strategy** is a plan made for youth by youth. At the core of the process was the Youth Research Team (YRT), a talented and diverse group of ten Torontonians aged 18–29 who are passionate about city building. The YRT was tasked with studying youth engagement issues with a broader youth audience across Toronto.

YOUTH RESEARCH TEAM



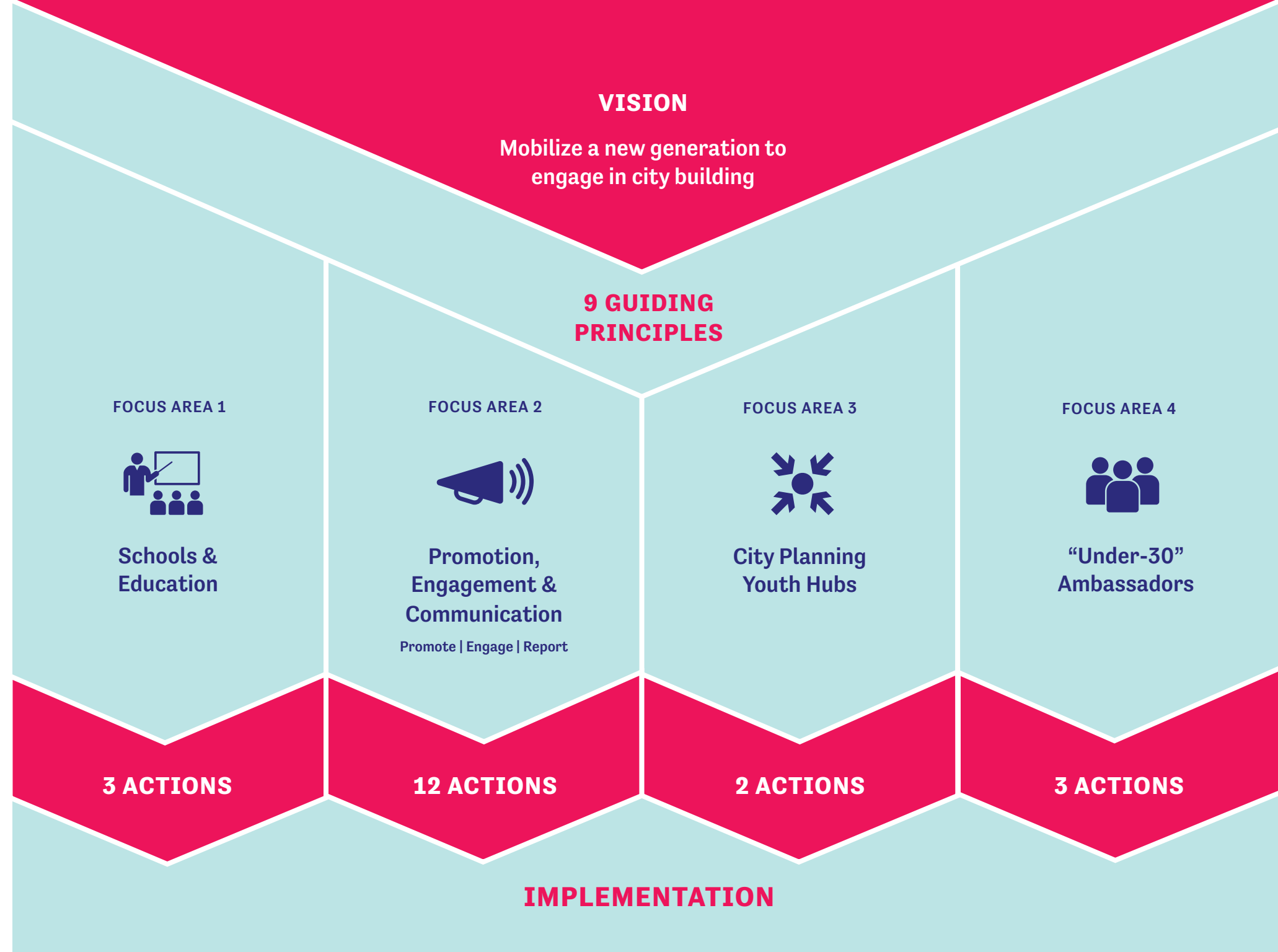
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The Youth Research Team connected with other youth to understand what issues matter most to them, when and how to involve youth in city building conversations and how to build youth understanding and engagement in city building.

Over an intensive five-week research period, the Team promoted, facilitated and documented engagement activities with over 400 of their peers across more than 15 Toronto neighbourhoods. In their consultations, they used a variety of methods, including surveys, pop-up town halls and facilitated workshops, resulting in over 150 pages of documentation. All of this research then formed the basis of the Strategy, which the YRT, Consultant Team and City staff developed collaboratively.

Strategy Framework

The Strategy's policy framework begins with a vision to mobilize a new generation to engage in city building. This is followed by a series of 9 Guiding Principles, which are intended to guide all of City Planning's engagement efforts with youth. The four Focus Areas are the big moves of the Plan, and each are supported by a series of Actions, which are the specific projects recommended for implementing the objectives of the Focus Area. Finally, an Implementation Plan charts a course for advancing the Plan's recommendations.



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» **Relevance of planning.** Many youth indicated they aren't familiar enough with what city planning is, how it applies to their lives, or why it should matter to them.

» **Importance of Planning.** Youth indicated that they struggled to understand the relevance of city planning relative to other priorities, like school, work and socializing.

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STRATEGY



The Youth Engagement Strategy is central to City Planning's goal of making Toronto the most engaged city in North America on planning issues. It envisions a future Toronto where **a whole new generation of youth is mobilized to engage in city building.**

The Strategy for realizing this vision includes nine Guiding Principles, four Focus Areas and 20 Actions.

Guiding Principles

The nine Guiding Principles should inform all youth engagement undertaken by City Planning:

- » **Focus on stages of life, not ages.** There are many different stages of life within the youth demographic (high school student, young adult, university/college student, young professional), and each needs a different approach to become engaged in city planning discussions.
- » **Engage youth early.** People often develop their core interests, beliefs, and habits in their high-school years (or, in some cases, even earlier). Sparking a person’s interest in planning at this point in their life makes it much likelier they will become active participants in the planning process later in life.
- » **Overcome intimidation.** Getting youth to participate means creating an environment where they feel safe, supported, and comfortable enough to engage.
- » **Put youth in positions of influence.** Youth engagement works best when it’s youth-led. When youth see other people their age in positions of influence, it gives them greater confidence that their interests and perspectives will be respected and reflected within City Planning.
- » **Consider different geographies and income levels.** Toronto is geographically, culturally and socio-economically diverse. Different approaches will work for different areas and communities, so it’s important to consider what works for different audiences.

- » **Work towards both short-term and long-term systemic change.** For youth engagement to be most impactful, it needs to include both quick actions and actions that focus on longer-term, systemic change.
- » **Go to where youth are.** Meeting youth in the physical and virtual spaces they inhabit can bring them into city planning conversations in a way that is convenient for them.
- » **Foster partnerships and build youth capacity.** There are already many youth-focused organizations doing good work with and for youth in Toronto. Leveraging these organizations’ networks will help youth develop an interest in city planning and build their capacity.
- » **Make it fun!** Youth are more likely to participate in a process that’s fun, creative or social. Typical planning processes can feel dry or boring—if you want youth to participate, you have to shake things up a bit!

Focus Areas and Actions

The four Focus Areas reflect the priorities identified by the Youth Research Team through its research and in workshops with the City and Consultant Team. Each Focus Area contains specific Actions to implement the recommendation. For a more detailed explanation of each Action, visit www.toronto.ca/growingconversations/youth.

FOCUS AREA ONE:

Schools & Education



Connecting with youth when they’re at school can help them develop an awareness of—and an interest in—planning when they’re otherwise still forming political interests and habits. For newcomers, children often serve as interpreters of civic life for their parents, broadening the impact of connecting with them in schools.

Formal education occurs beyond the classroom as well, including through skill-development programs, workshops, and summer camps. Since these programs help build youth capacity in areas they’re already interested in, they’re a good way for City Planning to connect youth’s existing interests to planning and to provide youth with transferable, marketable skills.

The Actions in this Focus Area aim to connect City Planning to youth in these two different educational settings.

- ACTION 1:** Develop a “Planners in Classrooms” (PiCs) educational outreach program to increase awareness of planning issues and concepts among youth.
- ACTION 2:** Develop a recognition or accreditation system for schools participating in PiCs.
- ACTION 3:** Partner with skill-development organizations to build youth capacity while engaging on planning issues.

Promotion, Engagement, & Communication



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New approaches to promotion, engagement, and communication are needed to make planning more exciting for youth, as well as to better explain the connection between participant feedback and its influence on decision-making.

Most engagement processes include three steps: promotion of a project or engagement activity (like a town hall or a survey), engagement with the public (in a meeting or at a pop-up, for example), and a report-back on the feedback received (in a consultant or a staff report). The Actions proposed in this Focus Area are organized according to these three steps.

PROMOTE →

- ACTION 4:**
Promote and campaign using social media channels.
- ACTION 5:**
Develop a City Planning Division YouTube Series / podcast.
- ACTION 6:**
Promote engagement in new physical spaces like coffee shops, TTC shelters, and libraries.
- ACTION 7:**
Partner with local media to better promote engagement activities.

ENGAGE →

- ACTION 8:**
Provide remote access to meetings.
- ACTION 9:**
Involve artists in engagement processes.
- ACTION 10:**
Go beyond traditional engagement methods to reach youth audiences. Make it fun, creative, and social.
- ACTION 11:**
Host meetings or engagement activities in the places youth already are.
- ACTION 12:**
Require Stakeholder Advisory Groups or Committees convened by City Planning to include youth representation.
- ACTION 13:**
Implement an “Office Hours” program in libraries to make Community Planners more accessible.
- ACTION 14:**
Expand and extend Planners in Public Spaces (PIPs).

REPORT

- ACTION 15A:**
Use engaging media such as videos, infographics or interactive e-books to communicate the outcomes of planning processes with youth.
- ACTION 15B:**
Report more consistently on how participants’ feedback has influenced outcomes.

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FOCUS AREA THREE

Youth Hubs



18 Many youth prefer to connect with and learn from each other in places—both physical and digital—that are run specifically for them. These hubs are places where youth can connect with their peers, develop new interests, and become engaged in local issues in their communities.

The City of Toronto’s Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA) and Parks, Forestry, and Recreation (PFR) Divisions, as well as the Toronto Public Library have been working together to develop both physical and digital Youth Hubs, and City Planning should collaborate with these divisions and agencies to support their work and connect youth hubs to City Planning engagement processes.

- ACTION 16:** Collaborate with other divisions to support Youth Hubs and Youth Lounges.
- ACTION 17:** Collaborate with other divisions to support the ongoing redevelopment of www.toronto.ca/youth.

FOCUS AREA FOUR

“Under-30” Ambassadors



Representation is an important issue for youth: they are much more likely to participate in a process if they see other youth in positions of influence (such as at the front of the room or leading a process) since it is an indication that their perspective is valued and will be heard.

Since representation can only be authentically reflected by people 30 and under, City Planning needs to work with youth ambassadors in that demographic. These ambassadors should have formal roles within, or relationships to, the City Planning Division; roles that are paid either financially or in credit. These 30-and-Unders (or “30+U”) could act as advisors to City Planning, ensuring that youth are being adequately engaged throughout a process. They could also play a more active on-the-ground

role, working with staff and consultants to actively engage youth. The Actions in the 30+U Focus Area reflect these three roles.

- ACTION 18:** Ensure equal youth representation for each Planning District on the new Toronto Planning Review Panel.
- ACTION 19:** Create a “30+U” Youth Engagement Specialist internship(s) to help implement the Youth Engagement Strategy.
- ACTION 20:** Require a “30+U” Ambassador on future consultant teams.



IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Broadly, there are two ways the City Planning Division can implement this report's recommendations:

» **By adding new requirements to City Planning RFPs or City Planning-led studies:**

City Planning can add new requirements to Requests for Proposals that require consultant teams to implement one or some of the Actions. On projects where City Planning leads the engagement process (i.e. projects that do not involve consultants), one or some Actions could be required to be addressed through internal work programs.

» **By initiating new programs and processes within the City Planning Division:** New initiatives and processes within City Planning can create an institutional shift in how City Planning approaches engagement. Once these new programs and processes become embedded as common practice, some could be required in future RFPs or City Planning-led studies.

For the full implementation plan, visit toronto.ca/growingconversations/youth

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((growing)) conversations
making engagement work





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