



Youth Ambassador Program

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The City of Toronto acknowledges that the land covered by this Master Plan is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. It also acknowledges that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaty signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this summary is to provide an overview of the engagement process and outcomes gathered through the Youth Ambassador program for the Toronto Island Master Plan. The Toronto Islands are visited by youth from all over the city. It is the site of many school trips, day camps and family camps, offering a wide range of unique experiences including canoeing, kayaking, paddle boarding, and exploring the island's ecosystems. Young people also come with their friends and families to visit the beaches, Centreville and the many attractions and amenities offered by the park. However, we know that there are youth across the city for whom getting to the Island (and therefore spending time there), is particularly difficult, because they are unaware of what the Island has to offer, or because they may be experiencing financial, transportation or other barriers limiting their access. It is the goal of the project to meaningfully engage all Torontonians in order to ensure that the future of Toronto Island Park is inclusive and reflective of everyone's voices and needs – including youth. For this very reason, we developed a Youth Ambassador Program, a team of 10 youth from different parts of the city that would support the engagement of their communities and peers to gather ideas and insights for the Master Plan from a youth perspective.

The Youth Ambassadors are part of the wider engagement program and strategy to co-create the Toronto Island Park Master Plan with Indigenous rights holders, waterfront and Island stakeholders, local communities and the general public. By taking this broad engagement approach we are collating thoughts, ideas and feedback gradually, over time and in a variety of ways to ensure Torontonians' voices and ideas are reflected in the final Master Plan.

There are three phases in the engagement process, which runs from 2021 to 2022. During the first phase of the project, we collaborated with Indigenous rights holders, Torontonians from across the City and City staff to develop a Vision, Guiding Principles and Values for Toronto Island Park.

The Youth Ambassador Program is part of the second phase of the Engagement Plan which is titled “Ideas to Concepts” and runs from June 2021 until November 2021. In this phase, the project team is confirming the Vision, Values and Guiding Principles and developing “**Big Ideas**” that will evolve into Demonstration Plans for Toronto Island Park.

Background

What is a Master Plan. A Master Plan is a long-term planning document that acts as a blueprint to guide future decision-making around improvements, programming, and management of a park. It influences decision-making, operations and future park improvements.

It is important to remember that a Master Plan does not get implemented all at once; it guides decision-making in the park over many years.

2. Vision, Values and Guiding Principles

In Phase One, the project team engaged thousands of people through online engagement tools and hundreds of people participated in "in-person" meetings, conversations and workshops to develop the Master Plan's Vision, Values, and Guiding Principles. This framework is intended to guide the decision making and thinking that will shape the Master Plan.

Vision

The Vision identifies the aspirations and the end goals of the Master Plan. It outlines priorities and high-level outcomes for the study. It has been developed using feedback received in Phase One of the engagement process and may evolve through the remaining phases of the project.

Toronto Island Park will be a place to:

Protect + Restore

- The Environment: through stewardship and management of sensitive environments and habitats
- The Community: to be safe, accessible and welcoming for all living beings
- The Self: to be a place of healing and respite, away from busy urban life and in touch with nature

Honour + Celebrate

- The land, water and sky, as well as all living beings that call Mnisising home: through Indigenous place-keeping, place-making and place-revealing
- The identity, character and legacy of the islands: through Indigenous, Settler, Immigrant, Refugee and Visitor perspectives
- Toronto's diverse communities: through creating a space that is inclusive and celebratory of Indigenous communities, Black communities, People of Colour, LGBTQ2S+, women and gender non-conforming people, disabled people, children and youth, seniors, people experiencing poverty and all equity-deserving communities

Gather + Support

- Explore collaborative governance, partnerships and coordinated program opportunities
- Promote sharing, learning and teaching: through land-based practices, partnerships and programs
- Ensure equitable access: through accessible and affordable spaces, experiences and connections

Values

Values are fundamental requirements for guiding the Master Plan. They are overarching ideals that are universally true, regardless of context or specific conditions. They also apply beyond the limits of this study and align with the City's corporate and divisional strategic initiatives.

The Values have been developed using feedback received in Phase 1 of the engagement process and may evolve through the remaining phases of the project.

The Toronto Island Park Master Plan must embody:

Respect

- By acknowledging the land as a living being
- By advocating for the rights of all living beings and systems first and as part of interconnected and interdependent systems and existence
- By honouring the practices and rights of past, present and future inhabitants

Diversity

- By prioritizing inclusion and celebration of differing worldviews, experiences, and abilities
- By ensuring equitable access to amenities, facilities, and services
- By protecting and restoring sensitive and unique environments and habitats

Balance

- By considering the needs of all parts of a system in the sharing and distribution of resources
- By prioritizing the needs of the natural environment over human use and comfort

Accountability

- By committing to transparent processes
- By developing sustainable investment in social, environmental and economic initiatives
- By cultivating lasting relationships with rights holders, stakeholders and communities

Youth Engagement Guiding Principles

The following nine Guiding Principles were developed by the City Planning Division as part of their Youth Engagement Strategy. They were used to inform the youth engagement done through the Toronto Island Master Plan:

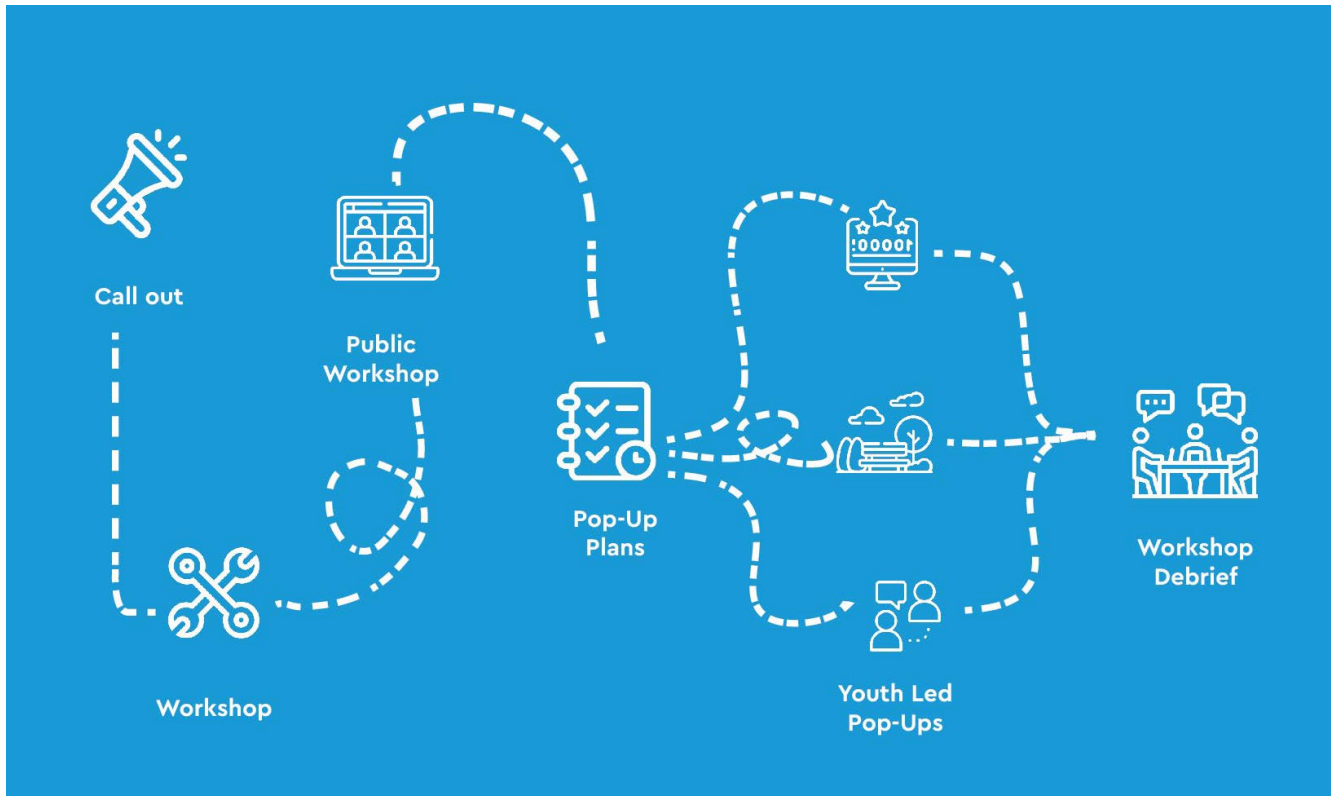
- **Focus on stages of life, not ages.** There are many different stages of life within the youth demographic (high school student, young adult, university/college student, young professional), and each needs a different approach to become engaged in city planning discussions.
- **Engage youth early.** 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. City of Toronto City Planning Division Youth Engagement Strategy – Final Report 14

- **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.

Youth Engagement Strategy

In 2015, the City of Toronto's City Planning Division published its first Youth Engagement Strategy, a document developed in close collaboration with city of Toronto youth, following a similar process to the one used here. Though the Strategy belongs to City Planning, it guided us in our development of this youth engagement program. The Strategy describes key city planning-related issues that Toronto youth care about, many of which are relevant to the Toronto Island Master Plan and its goals, including: transit and transportation, supporting play, urban design and public realm and the environment. It also outlines youth engagement best practices, which were considered when developing the Youth Ambassador Program.

Process



Outreach

Since the beginning of the project, the project team has been focused on delivering a comprehensive, dynamic and inclusive engagement strategy for the Master Plan. The project team has met with youth as well as organizations and service providers working directly with youth like recreation staff, ENAGBE and the Toronto Youth Cabinet. As part of this outreach, a call for applications to the "Toronto Island - Youth Ambassador Program" was shared with these networks and they were encouraged to share the call broadly. Taking this approach was successful! In total, the City received 45 applications!

Youth Ambassadors

The process to select Youth Ambassadors prioritized youth that demonstrated strong connections to their communities, youth that demonstrated an understanding of equity as well as those having demonstrated facilitation skills. We also prioritized youth that lived outside of the downtown core who were generally underrepresented through other engagement in the Master Plan process. All youth ambassadors were paid an honorarium. In total 10 youth ambassadors from across the city were selected, with ages ranging from 15 to 27, and who collectively speak 9 different languages.

Training Support

Youth Ambassadors attended an orientation session on July 19th facilitated by the project team. The workshop focused on getting the Youth Ambassadors familiarized with the engagement process and outcomes that had been conducted to date, as well as how their feedback was going to be incorporated into the master plan and what resources were available to them. Youth Ambassadors were recognized as experts when it came to engaging their peers and were encouraged to plan fun and creative pop-ups the provided incentives for participating. The goal being that their pop-up engagements didn't just extract information from their communities, but also gave something back.

Youth Ambassadors were asked to engage their communities using the projects Big Ideas as prompts. The [Big Ideas](#) are specific ideas to bring the projects vision to live. Big Ideas were collected from the public through a digital platform and ranged from programming to physical changes and more.

The Big Ideas provided an easy entry point to spark young people's imaginations, however pop-up participants were welcomed to provide ideas and feedback beyond the Big Ideas that they saw. Youth Ambassadors that hosted online workshops were given a toolkit for them to present the big ideas virtually. Youth Ambassadors that held in-person pop ups were provided 24" x 36" engagement boards, easels, sticky notes, markers etc. for facilitating their pop ups.

The Youth Ambassadors were also invited to the project's second Public Workshop on July 21st which focused on presenting Big Ideas for the public, providing an example of how Youth Ambassadors might facilitate their workshops.



Pop-Ups

We understand that youth are experts at engaging their peers, which is why we encouraged the Youth Ambassadors to develop their own engagement plans for their pop-ups. Some youth teamed up into groups; one team conducted an online pop-up and others conducted pop-ups in their neighbourhood parks. All youth were each given a **\$200** disbursement budget, which could be used towards engagement materials, prizes and incentives for engaging their communities.

Pop-up at Centre Island

Three Youth Ambassadors, Harani, Michelle and Zhane, hosted a pop-up at Toronto Island Park on Centre Island. They set up engagement boards provided by the project team, in a gazebo a few metres from the ferry dock in order to talk with people as they arrived or departed the Island. The Ambassadors brought snacks, water, Jamaican patties and games for children to play as a way to engage passersby.

Pop-up at Lindy Lou Park (North York)

"There are many ethnic minorities, people who belong to marginalized groups, and socio-economically disadvantaged people in my community. So, I thought there was no better than to talk and invite them in person."

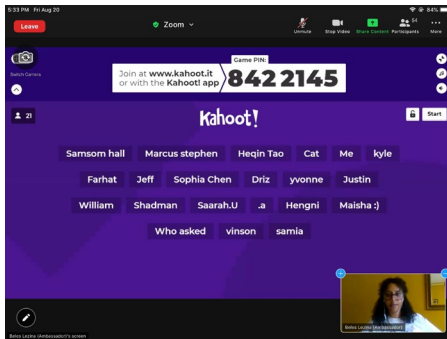
One Youth Ambassador, Neima, hosted a pop up in her local park in North York. Neima promoted the pop-up with her peers, family, neighbours and friends. Neima made an effort to invite people in person whenever possible and also engaged with people walking by the park using an engagement table with freezies and a raffle to invite participants.

Pop-up at Neilson Park (Scarborough)



Another Youth Ambassador, Roshni, hosted a pop up at her neighbourhood park in Scarborough. Leading up to the pop up, Roshni shared invitations with her personal networks, on social media and with "Not-for-Profits" in the neighbourhood. Roshni set up four engagement boards and shared prepackaged snacks as an incentive for participants.

Virtual Trivia Night Pop-Up



A team of 4 Youth Ambassadors, Christine, Beles, Song and Harani, hosted a trivia night followed by 4 breakout room workshops where participants got to comment on the preliminary Big Ideas and share their own ideas, comments and concerns for the Master Plan. Some of the Youth Ambassadors belonged to the Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) and promoted the trivia night through the TYC's social media channels, slack channel and networks.

They also created bright posters that they posted in their respective neighbourhoods. The trivia night included questions about the Island and was attended by 75 young people.

Virtual Games Night

"First, I gave some background knowledge to help everyone make educated and intelligent decisions. Then I played a Kahoot to expand people's knowledge a bit further while having fun." - Kishan

Youth Ambassador, Kishan, hosted a virtual games night on zoom. Kishan focused his outreach on Neilson/Scarborough youth using social media and discord group chats. The games night started with a presentation about Toronto Island and was followed by Kahoot games before jumping into a facilitated discussion/workshop about Big Ideas.

3. What did youth ambassadors hear?

History Culture and Storytelling

Indigenous Stories and Culture

Across most of the youth-led pop ups, participants were in agreement that centering Indigenous stories and cultures, and creating spaces for ceremony and gathering, was important. Some youth shared that they would like to see programming to learn about Indigenous cultures and practices with Indigenous youth. Some youth suggested that Indigenous students from Toronto should be able to share their art at the Island, or create participatory art programs that welcomed the larger community. It was also suggested that there should be Indigenous programming for school trips. Lastly, there was also mention of having Indigenous-led businesses and food available at the Island.

Stories are Important to Youth

In one of the workshops, youth were really excited to learn about the "ghost" story of the lighthouse keeper. You indicated that these types of stories would make youth excited about visiting the island. It was also suggested that the many stories of the Island could be shared using QR codes placed in key areas across the Island.

Environment

Garbage Free

Some youth expressed concerns about garbage (particularly at the beaches) as well as concerns with dog owners not picking up after their dogs. A lot of youth thought that there should be education about how visitors could care for the Island and that there should be consequences for littering. It was also suggested that there could be clean-up events that welcome youth who want to volunteer. Youth also wanted to see water bottle filling stations so that people didn't have to buy plastic water bottles.

Opportunities to Learn Ecosystems

Youth shared that they wanted to learn more about the ecosystems at the Island. Some youth suggested that there could be trails with signage about the species and animals that inhabit the Island.

Opportunities for Stewardship

At some pop-ups, youth heard that they wanted to see opportunities and events where they could plant trees and gardens and generally care for the Island.

More Plants, Trees, Flowers and Gardens

The Youth Ambassadors received several suggestions about expanding gardens, planting flowers and trees.

Sustainability is Important

A lot of youth shared that they wished the Island was powered by clean energy, including the ferries and any transportation that is considered or included across the Island.

Visitor Experience

Info Accessibility

Ambassadors heard from many other youth that they met through their engagements that:

- "they didn't even know that the Island existed!"
- "they didn't know it was a place where they were welcome"
- "there were things for them to do there."

Youth also shared that they wanted easier to access, youth-friendly information about events and experiences that were accessible to them. There was some mention about spotty cellphone reception, which limits their ability to access information (their preferred method) once they get to the Island. It was suggested that QR codes would be helpful for sharing information across the Island.

Diversity of Programming

Some youth wanted to see youth-centered events and youth days as well as art festivals and cultural events, especially during important times like Black/Asian History Month. There were also suggestions for QR code-enabled scavenger hunts.

Day Camps and Overnight Stays

"Moms also wanted day camps for children and youth"

Some youth shared that they would like to see opportunities for overnight stays at the island and camping, as well as day camps during the summer.

Expand Connectivity on the Islands

It was suggested that the ferry could be connected to the TTC system. Some supported the idea of a transportation system on the Island, however some youth expressed concerns about the impact that would have on the environment and suggested that transportation on the Island should be only for those who need it. Youth also suggested that there could be bike lanes installed. At a few pop ups, Ambassadors also heard that finding parking and parking costs were a deterrent for visiting the Island. At another pop up, youth suggested more pedestrian bridges connecting different parts of the Island.

Year-Round Activities

"A cooling centre and swimming pool. It is really hot lately. Shelters are good but cooling centres and pools for youth..."

In some of the pop-ups, Ambassadors heard that they would like to see winter activities, ice skating, warming stations and hot chocolate as well as winter light installations. There was also excitement towards night sky viewing both in winter and summer. Cooling centres and pools were also recommended.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Financial Accessibility

"As of right now, the costs to get around the Islands and have fun (renting equipment, amusement park tickets, etc.) make the trip expensive"

Some youth shared that visiting the Island, and visiting it regularly, was not financially accessible. It was suggested that there could be ferry discounts for youth and that there could be days where attractions at the Island were cheaper. Youth also shared that they would like to see less expensive rental equipment like kayaks and paddle boards.

Safety

Some youth shared that they didn't feel safe at the Island and mentioned that they had heard about a homophobic assault. Some youth were concerned about being stranded at the Island, unable to get on a ferry back to the city. At one pop up, youth suggested that there could be increased police presence as well as life guards and first respondents, while at another pop up youth suggested that they would like to see no police presence.

Diverse Food Options

Some youth mentioned that they had cultural dietary considerations and restrictions and commented on the lack of food options at the Island, particularly Halal, vegan and vegetarian options.

Partnerships and School Trips

Some youth shared that it was difficult for their parents to take them to the Island and even more challenging for them to get there on their own. It was noted that for some youth living outside of the downtown core, it can take up to 1.5 hours to get to the Island using public transit. There were many suggestions to expand opportunities for school field trips and to create partnerships with after school programs, community centres, youth centres and libraries.

Accessible Infrastructure

In general, youth commented that they wished the Island was accessible for people with disabilities. It was suggested that pathways needed more benches and places to rest, as well as shelters distributed across the Island.

Prayer Space

Some youth mentioned that they needed to pray at specific times and that a prayer space would make the Island more accessible to them.

4. Conclusion

The feedback collected through this process will be incorporated into the overall feedback that we've heard to date. This collective data will influence the development of the preliminary Master Plan concept plans that will be presented to the broader public for feedback.

Beyond the valuable and nuanced information gathered, the Youth Ambassador program helped the project team develop relationships with young people who will continue to be invited to participate in the remainder of the project. It is the project's intention to centre youth voices when planning the future of Toronto Island Park.