

Youth Climate Engagement Strategy

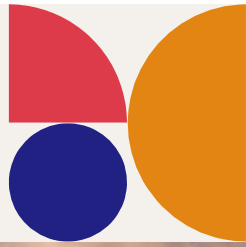
City of Toronto

Prepared By: Youth Climate Action in Toronto

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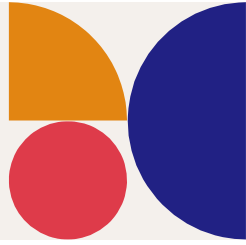
Land Acknowledgement



Tkaronto is on the land and waters of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Nations, the Wendat, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Tkaronto is covered by the Dish with One Spoon wampum belt treaty between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee nations, an agreement open to all for the peaceful sharing and stewarding of these lands. Tkaronto is also covered by Treaty 13, established in 1805 between the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Government of Canada.

This land acknowledgement is important not only to acknowledge the peoples on whose land the City of Toronto is located but also because climate change intrinsically connects to the settler-Indigenous Peoples relationship. Working towards climate justice means righting relations between settlers and Indigenous Peoples and transforming relationships between humans and the land, waters, and the more-than-human world.

Table of Contents

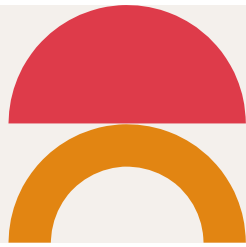


Overview

Land Acknowledgement.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Our Engagement Process.....	6
Engagement Activities.....	8
Key Themes.....	12
Our Recommendations.....	19
Conclusion.....	31
Additional Resources.....	32
References.....	36

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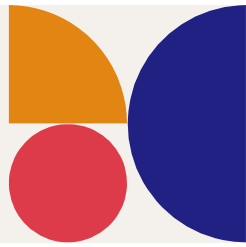
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Executive Summary



The City of Toronto's climate action strategy, called the TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, identified supporting youth leadership on climate action as a key priority for the City. The City of Toronto and a team from the University of Toronto, together with Toronto's youth leaders and community, undertook an engagement process to understand how the City can best support existing youth climate leadership and broader youth climate engagement and action.

Over a 12-month intensive period, the team facilitated and documented hundreds of hours of community engagement activities with over 800 youth 10-25 years old and community members, generating more than a thousand pages of feedback. Engagement methods included months-long youth cohorts, one-on-one conversations, immersive experiences, roundtables, interviews, and surveys. Engagement activities were designed to center different communities and neighborhoods, including, for example events focused in Little Jamaica and Scarborough; programming tailored towards Chinese and Chinese Canadian youth, Black and Indigenous high schoolers, 13-18 year-olds in the TDSB, primary students and their caregivers, Black and racialized youth from Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, and folks with disabilities; and engagements carried out with community partners like Let's Hike T.O., Malvern Family Resource Centre, and Lakeshore Arts.

Through this intensive process, the team identified 11 key themes for Toronto youth, including the key context necessary for any institutional engagement of youth on climate, the most important policy priorities, and the guiding principles for how youth want policies to be implemented and how they want to be engaged by the City going forward. We heard from youth that the process of engagement and implementation is just as important as any policy outcome. Based on the 11 themes, the team drafted 10 recommendations for the City's youth climate engagement.

Key Themes



Key Context

The key context for any municipal youth climate engagement is:

- **The power of youth ambassadors on climate**
- **Existing distrust of governments and institutions**
- **Mental health**



Policy Priorities

The 5 policy priorities identified by youth are:

- **Education**
- **Funding**
- **Connection and community**
- **Transit**
- **Jobs and skills training**



Guiding Principles

The guiding principles for the process of policy implementation and ongoing engagement are:

- **Justice, intersectionality, and accessibility**
- **Incentives**
- **Communication and social media**

Recommendations

Climate hubs: Fund, resource, connect, and support the development of climate hubs with a youth focus.

Transform youth climate engagement to bridge the gap between youth and the City: Shift the entire engagement process to feel mutually generative by centering more targeted, deeper engagement that can be adequately compensated rather than broad and shallow engagement, and delegate engagement to youth-led groups whenever feasible.

Transit justice and food justice: Prioritize intersectional, justice-oriented climate action in funding, policy, and engagement, especially food and transit justice.

More grants and resources for youth-led organizations: Focus on amplifying existing youth-led initiatives by giving more dedicated City resources to organizing, administrative, and logistical support to youth climate groups, and providing additional no-strings-attached funding for youth climate groups.

Justice-centered climate education: Identify, use, support, and amplify intersectional educational materials that match how youth are thinking and talking about climate change, and that move away from describing climate action as largely a problem of individual behaviour and consumer choices and more as an issue of nested injustices, collective action, and political advocacy.

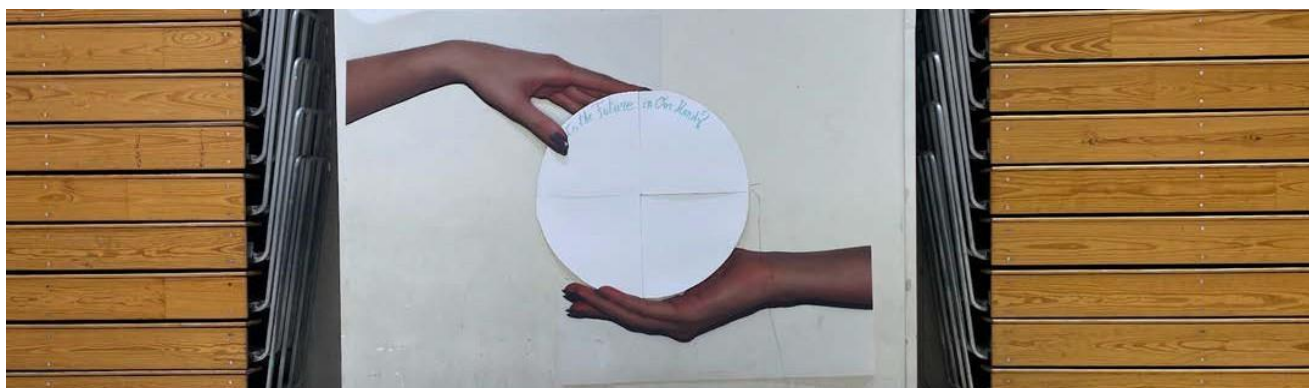
Partnerships with youth-led organizations and academic institutions: Outsource and/or delegate climate engagement and research work to youth as much as possible, and shift City resources to logistical and administrative support.

Specific resources for racialized youth: Create and/or scale up specific grants, programs, and staff time dedicated to supporting and engaging BIPOC youth, especially Black and Indigenous youth, on climate action.

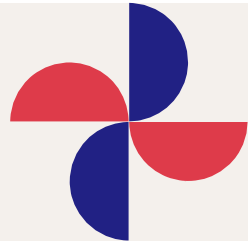
Ease, play, and mental health: Meet youth where they are in specific life stages and identify engagement opportunities that can add ease and play to their lives, and design engagement opportunities with the mental health impacts of climate change in mind.

Jobs and skills training: Connect climate change to jobs and skills training as often and early as possible (and connect climate to as big a diversity of jobs, skills, and interests as possible).

Mentorship: Create a mentorship program that connects youth across the City to the abundance of existing climate programming being offered.



Our Engagement Process



The City of Toronto's climate action strategy, called the TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, identified supporting youth leadership on climate action as a key priority for the City. From 2023-2024, the City of Toronto and a team from the University of Toronto, together with Toronto's youth leaders and community, developed the recommendations in this youth climate engagement strategy. The recommendations are intended to amplify the exemplary youth-led climate work already being done on the ground and to support broader youth engagement in climate action.

The engagement and strategy development process had several main phases:

Dates	Phase	Work
April 2023 to June 2023	Environmental scan and preliminary report, " Best Practices to Support Youth Climate Action in Toronto "	The team completed a jurisdictional scan and literature review of relevant best practices, as well as interviews with stakeholders including City staff, youth climate activists, and youth engagement specialists.
June 2023 to August 2023	Stage 0 Co-design process with youth climate leaders	The co-design process involved a workshop and series of one-on-one conversations intended to flatten inherent power dynamics between youth and researchers. Key principles and themes that emerged from the co-design process shaped the engagement activities.
June 2023 to June 2024	12-month intensive engagement process	We ran more than a dozen engagement projects, and opened a survey to youth across the GTA, reaching more than 800 youth and community members.
June 2024	Youth-led synthesis of peer engagement data	To ensure youth also had a key role in sorting and synthesizing the feedback from engagement activities, we engaged a team of undergraduate researchers to rigorously analyze the data to draw out preliminary themes and recommendations. We also welcomed youth from across the engagement activities to a one-day workshop to help us prioritize recommendations.
July 2024 to November 2024	Report drafting and iterative check-ins with youth reviewers	We included youths' own words wherever possible in the report and provided honoraria to a team of youth reviewers to ensure the strategy accurately reflected youth feedback and recommendations.

Guiding Principles

During the stage 0 co-design process, we heard youth say that if initial engagement is not done thoughtfully, **City engagement can actually undermine trust in government institutions**, and thus disrupt future municipal efforts to empower youth climate action. Engagement is being carried out in the context of a much larger trend where youth in Canada and abroad feel betrayed by governments and institutions for their failure to prevent the climate crisis.¹ That sense of betrayal is linked to significant mental health impacts.²

Additionally, while City staff are often viewed positively by Toronto youth, the institution of the City is viewed with skepticism and distrust, especially by racialized youth and youth climate movement leaders. Based on this youth feedback and critical social science, our team developed a set of guiding principles to shape our engagement process.

Centering justice and equity: We took an equity-centred approach by prioritizing anti-oppression, equity-deserving communities, reconciliation, accessibility, and by building meaningful partnerships with youth and communities.

Prioritizing youth feedback and leadership at every stage: Using our unique advantage of being embedded at a university and having youth climate organizers and youth 25 and under on our engagement team, we partnered with youth at every stage of the engagement process—design, engagement, facilitation, analysis, and review of the report.

Focusing on deeper, mutually generative engagement projects over larger-scale but lighter-touch and more shallow engagement processes (for example, City-wide boothing). For every engagement pilot, event, or activity we asked ourselves:

- Can we robustly answer what youth would get out of the engagement? (For example, community, payment for their time, skills-building, mentorship, professional development, fun, good food, etc.).
- Does this engagement have the potential to increase feelings of institutional betrayal or apathy, or worsen climate anxiety? (By, for example, feeding into a pattern of institutional extraction of information from youth without clear follow-through)

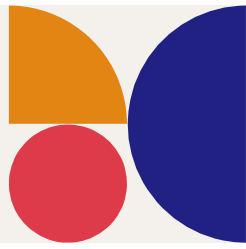
Engagement activities:

To get the best sense of what does and does not work on youth climate engagement, we piloted a variety of novel engagement strategies, reaching more than 800 youth 10–25 years old and community members.

These included a mix of cohort-based programming (including an afterschool urban land education program designed for Black and Indigenous youth); one-on-one conversations with youth leaders and practitioners; unique one-off events (including an interactive audio experience for primary students), and more traditional consultation events with youth and City staff. Events were tailored to reach both youth already actively engaged in climate action and those not yet engaged.

Additionally, we drew from an online survey open to youth across the GTA and theses and reports created by university student researchers.

Engagement Activities



Youth Dreaming and Designing Relations to Lands and Waters

An afterschool urban land education program designed for Black and Indigenous youth ages 14 to 18 to come together, and talk about the climate crisis, climate justice, and their desired climate futures. Youth created a podcast episode and participated in the design of land education programs.

Finding Purpose, Nourishment and Solidarity in the Age of Climate Crisis

A documentary screening, book launch, and discussion of Britt Way's recently published *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis*. An evening of holding space for hard climate emotions and leaning into meaning, purpose, and community in the face of climate anxiety.

Exploring Rest, Recovery, and Resistance in Pedagogy

This virtual event featured the youth-led non-profit Shake Up The Establishment introducing their new book and educational guide for climate activists and organizers: "Practicing Rest, Recovery, Resistance: An Interactive Dreaming Journal." Toronto students and educators got to learn about one of the most comprehensive youth-created education resources focused on intersectional, resilient, and just climate action.

Youth Leadership for Social and Environmental Transformation: Food, Climate, Justice

This project brought together youth working at the intersections of food and climate justice activism to co-develop a broad engagement and action strategy toward the realization of just food futures within the City of Toronto, and beyond. Through a series of community solidarity-building activities, youth co-developed objectives and goals for a youth-led food/climate justice engagement strategy.

Defending Democracy Workshop

A workshop for middle- and high-school students on the connection between climate change and democracy held in collaboration with Lakeshore Arts and the Climate Emergency Unit. Youth got to write their own dream climate action plans and create collages based on those plans.

Youth Climate Action Roundtables

The Youth Climate Action Roundtables brought together alumni from the Skills For Change: Youth Climate Action Initiative (YCAI) program and City of Toronto staff to discuss how the City of Toronto can support broader youth engagement in climate action.

Move, Play, and Connect on Climate

This fun-filled event was designed in collaboration with Nolan Gibot, Indigenous Youth Research Associate with the City of Toronto's Environment and Climate Division. The event brought climate conversations to the middle of the gym, welcoming students to engage in sports, games, and meaningful conversations about the parallels between sports and climate action.

Climate In Cultural Hubs

A collaboration with the Toronto chapter of the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNCTO) to explore cultural connections through the climate justice leadership of Chinese Canadian youth. The youth team that joined this cohort designed and facilitated an intergenerational community-based climate action workshop, titled "From Sewing to Growing: Taking ClimACTION with Chinese Youth in the GTA".

Toronto Schools Youth Climate Leadership Group

This pilot brought together students 13-18 from across the City to explore models for intersectional municipal climate engagement and to draft recommendations to the City for how to support youth climate action.

Just and Accountable Futures: Developing a Proposed Climate Policy Accountability Approach for the City of Toronto

In collaboration with the Reach Alliance, this pilot explored how the City of Toronto can be more accountable to youth around climate action goals, with a particular focus on Black and racialized youth living or working in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). The study recognized the importance of involving youth, given their disproportionate vulnerability to climate anxiety, which can have lasting effects on their mental and physical well-being.

Pollinator Pop Up Audio Experience

A playful interactive audio experience to help kids learn about and feel empowered to help pollinators and ecosystems in a warming climate. This pilot was designed to target elementary school youth and their families, and to create a resource for parents and elementary schools to support building agency and resiliency on climate early.

Climate Hub Hike

Community climate leaders took part in a joyful, intergenerational hike, facilitated by community partner Let's Hike T.O., to discuss ideas for climate hubs in the GTA to support youth work on climate action and justice. As they walked through urban environments and green spaces, attendees made new connections and found synergies with one another's work.



Image Credit: Karim Rizkallah

Climate Action and Democracy Workshop

A series of workshops for youth 18 to 25 across the GTA to learn how to identify and challenge organized climate obstruction and toxic climate narratives. The workshops were designed to help inoculate youth against climate despair and empower them on their collective agency to shape our City and our future.

Recommendations Workshop

Youth who participated in other engagements returned for this 3-hour workshop to further develop recommendations for Toronto's youth climate engagement strategy. Participants collectively decided what they felt was most exciting and most possible as climate engagement strategies.

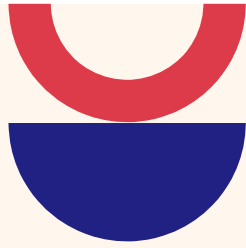


Artist Credit: Aadehwiin

Case Study

Youth Dreaming and Designing Relations to Lands and Waters

By JP Craig



Youth Dreaming and Designing Relations to Lands and Waters (YDDRLW) was an afterschool urban land education program designed by the Tkaronto CIRCLE Lab, supervised by Dr. Eve Tuck (Unangaᖅ) and Dr. Fikile Nxumalo (Ndwandwe), at the University of Toronto. The program invited Black, Indigenous, and Afro-Indigenous young people, aged 14-18, to become co-researchers in a 3-month participatory design project. The goal was to support youth co-researchers in understanding climate change and climate justice through their relations with urban more-than-human beings like plants, animals, and waterways.

Co-researchers also provided recommendations on improving urban land education and engaging Black and Indigenous young people in climate action in ways that reflect their experiences, relations to Land and waters, and desired climate futures.

"School systems [are] not making climate change a priority in the classroom."

— Sterling, 14, Youth Co-Researcher

"A way that we can support our Black and Indigenous youth in climate action is making things relevant to them. You want to have stuff that's going on that intrigues the Black youth, that intrigues the Indigenous youth, something that's going to correlate to their day-to-day lives. How is what we're doing going to help you? How is what we're going to do going to better you and your family and your community?"

— Joanna, 14, Youth Co-Researcher

Joanna and Sterling's words highlight a general concern shared by youth co-researchers: climate change is not treated like a serious, urgent, or relevant reality. They expressed frustration that even when it is discussed their worldviews and relations to Land are often marginalized or excluded from the conversation. In schools, mainstream climate education tends to prioritize human-centric, instrumentalist frameworks. These approaches often sustain extractive relations to land and overlook ongoing colonialism and anti-Black racism, particularly in urban settings where Black and Indigenous young people face barriers like fences and policing when connecting with Land. Land education programs like YDDRLW

intervene by creating space for them to make meaning of climate change from their own perspectives and grow deeper connections to Land and more-than-human climate justice.

To design this space, the program curriculum drew on the Tkaronto CIRCLE Lab's [Land Education Dreambook](#), an online program design toolkit, and on visiting as an Indigenous feminist practice,³ which nurtures relational accountability to Land, waters, and more-than-human beings. Co-researchers engaged in activities tailored to urban Land, such as planting and tending to seeds and mapping waterways buried by development. They visited Taddle Creek (Ziibiing), a river buried under the University of Toronto, to collaboratively create a poem honoring its presence. They also participated in Podcard challenges, recording local water sounds and reflecting on climate justice for these waters. They made protest signs in solidarity with more-than-human beings, and visited Aamjiwnaang First Nation, surrounded by Chemical Valley, to learn from Vanessa Gray, a young Anishinaabe land and water protector, about community care on the frontlines of environmental violence.

Through these activities, youth co-researchers envisioned climate action and education centered on reciprocal relations with more-than-human beings. Their insights called for more relevant and experiential climate education, stronger connections to urban Land, sanctuaries for animals displaced by urbanization, dedicated space for Indigenous youth to be with Land through ceremony and stewardship, and sustained funding and space for youth-led climate action.

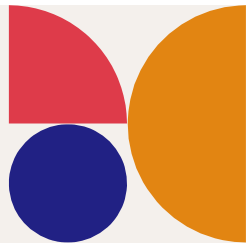
"I feel like listening to water as part of climate justice allows us to fully interact and understand what we're fighting for... to actually comprehend and feel what we want to achieve, which is a more symbiotic relationship with water, with the earth, and to maintain a sort of homeostasis with the world and with us."

— Waeyes, 17, Youth Co-Researcher



Listen: To hear directly from youth co-researchers, listen to their podcast on *The Henceforward* (<http://www.thehenceforward.com/>), Episode 30: Youth Dreaming and Designing Relations to Lands and Waters.

Key Themes



What did we hear?

We've synthesized more than a thousand pages of youth feedback into 11 key themes, and 10 key recommendations. The themes are divided into three broad categories: things that are uniquely important context for institutional engagement on youth climate action (or "Key Context"), what climate policy priorities youth want the City to act on (or the "What"), and how youth want to interact with the City and how they want policies to be designed and implemented (or the "How"). The recommendations are designed to address the What, the How, and the Key Context in an integrated way. In an effort to center how youth feel and what youth want in their own words, we've included quotes from the various engagement data.

Key Context

*Engaging **youth** on **climate** presents unique challenges and opportunities. Youth already feel that their institutions have failed them on climate and that sense of betrayal by adults and institutions is profoundly impacting their mental health. Also, even if the City does everything it its power to act on climate, youth are still going to watch, experience, and grieve the continued impacts of a warming world. The key is to help foster resiliency, agency, and leadership in youth, and to show how the City's actions make life tangibly better for its residents while explicitly acknowledging the City's limitations.*

The Power of Youth Ambassadors on Climate

Youth are powerful catalysts for collective climate action. We know from the social science that youth are disproportionately likely to care about climate change and think it's an urgent priority.⁴ We also know they can be effective ambassadors to get their parents and grandparents to care more about and take action on climate change.⁵

For example, climate justice youth leaders were critical allies in protecting their communities during the pandemic—they were experienced with mutual aid, translation, thinking about vulnerable folks, debunking misinformation, and science communication. Toronto youth are speaking to their families, relatives, and communities about climate change and its connection to justice and other resonant issues. They would like to see more recognition for their leadership from the City, and they think such recognition could be very motivating and empowering for further climate action.

"Seeing youth get acknowledged for their collective action can be inspiring and motivating."

"One other thing I will say about the climate strikes is that the students who participated in them, they came out en mass...and I don't know if anyone ever really told them how that massive strike was really influential."

Existing Distrust of the Institution of “the City” and Other Levels of Government

For a large number of youth, there is a deep distrust of the City and other levels of government that will require lasting relationship-building to overcome, especially for Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth. We heard that the current model of youth engagement is setting City-youth relationships up for failure, as youth often only interact with the City in what they perceive as shallow, extractive, tokenistic, or negative ways, and as there is a gap between how the City versus how youth speak and think about climate action.

Youth, especially Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth, want to move away from a model of engagement and towards a model of accountability, which includes both informal relational accountability and formal policy accountability levers. Youth also want to see folks who look like them and are connected to their communities in the City (for example, they raised the Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) Unit as an exemplary model of City-community interactions). Youth were clear to make a distinction between City staff (who are often viewed positively) and the institution of “the City.” Youth are skeptical that the institution can show true empathy, warmth, and care for them and their communities, and can really embrace intersectional justice as a priority.

Additionally, youth see a misalignment in the scale and urgency of how they talk about and view climate action versus how the City talks about and views climate action, which drives deep frustration and skepticism. Youth want comprehensive action now and they see climate as an existential threat, not just another policy issue in the City’s portfolio. Youth view climate action as centering justice, intersectionality, collective action, accessibility, political advocacy, storytelling, and movement-building while they view the City and other institutions as centering technocratic solutions, unaffordable consumer options (targeted more towards white and affluent residents), and individual emissions reductions. Words like “eco” and “net zero” do not excite or resonate with Toronto youth.

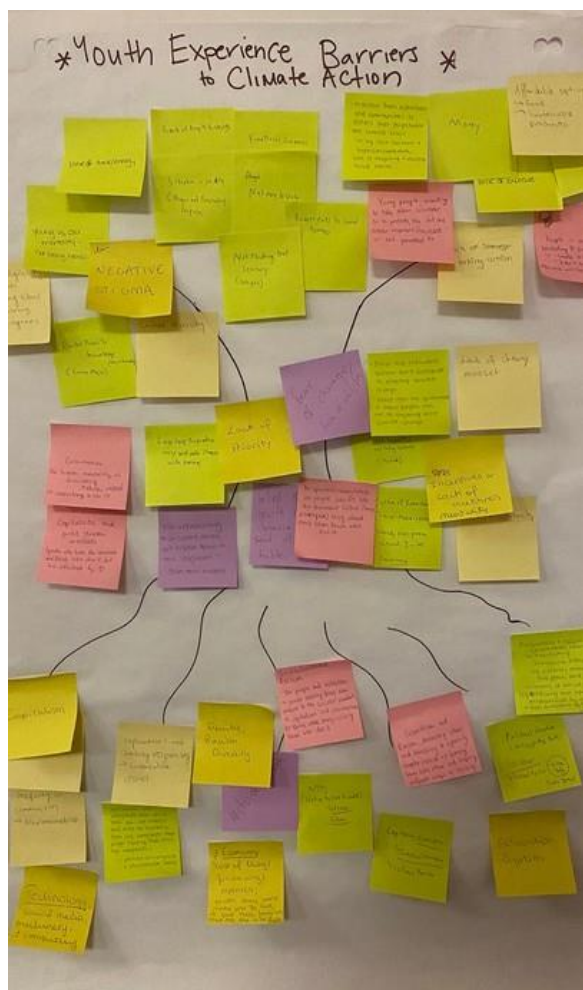
“Diversify groups.
‘Sustainability’ associated
with rich white folks, lots of
consumer action steps are
expensive and inaccessible.”

“I’ve been working in climate justice for a while, and currently, many youth groups are struggling with membership. This isn’t because my generation doesn’t care. We’ve been shouting in the streets for a long time! But for a few years, it felt like our voices were falling on deaf ears—that the systems of power were not extending any hands to us, were not giving us a way to take action and to work on climate justice. I think young people feel a bit disillusioned and isolated.”

“The invitation to youth to speak, and listening to youth speaking, without taking them seriously, without taking actions related to that input, not following up, taking actions directly against youth input.”

Mental Health

Toronto youth from across age groups, backgrounds, neighborhoods, and lived experiences are struggling (sometimes profoundly so) with climate anxiety, and it seems likely that this trend will continue as young folks experience worsening climate impacts. We spoke to clinical practitioners in Toronto who echoed this sentiment, confirming that youth were frequently raising climate as a worry. It is critical to design policy and engagement with mental health in mind, and anchor programming in a sense of realistic hope—acknowledging the very real and devastating consequences of climate change while showing that there is still hope for a resilient and just future and that youth have a key role to play in helping us reach that future.⁶ Youth also highlighted the importance of climate action integrating justice, play, joy, movement, sports, art, storytelling, outdoor education, intergenerational teachings, cultural relevance, music, food, community, agency, and hands-on experience as strategies for mitigating climate anxiety.



"Mitigating negative climate emotions in youth will encourage future engagement, positive climate frameworks increase social resilience and reduce feelings of helplessness and anxiety."

"Spreading poetry that counters narratives of hopelessness, shame, and self-blame while addressing climate anxiety."

"When I bring up climate and eco-anxiety [my] parents brush me off, which makes me question my own sanity and beliefs. It's super frustrating."

The What

Which 5 climate policy areas youth want the City to act on as soon as possible, presented in order of priority.

1. Education

Youth feel that robust climate education is a key gateway for empowerment and action, and that their climate education has important gaps. In particular, youth:

- described a common and disempowering perception that climate action is equivalent to being able to afford sustainable consumer options (that it's something for bougie folks).
- requested training in political advocacy, intersectionality, organizing, social movements, and Indigenous law and sovereignty.
- want comprehensive, intersectional education to reach them in school and start early.
- are hungry for opportunities to create, make art, and tell stories, and to have their work amplified.
- asked for climate to be integrated into all classes and subjects, not just science.
- were keen to have lessons on climate misinformation and social media literacy.

"Have to seek climate out in advanced classes. Folks don't realize we need everyone on climate/climate action is for everyone."

"Interdisciplinary approach of integrating climate science into curriculum from elementary to high school with other ways of knowing / doing (like sewing, biking), integrate outside parties into learning (eg. environmental non-profits), representation of youth / leaders – so that people can see themselves reflected in action."

2. Funding

Over and over again, youth voiced a desire for more funding for youth climate action. In particular, they stressed the importance of consistent, no-strings-attached funding. There's a real fear, especially among youth climate leaders, that accepting funding from institutions will allow those institutions to co-opt, control, and water down youth climate groups' messaging and actions.

"Youth want to get involved, have ideas, initiatives they want to create. Biggest barrier they face is funding. Without resources, money, allies, things youth want to do aren't possible."

"Our voices are often ignored or not taken seriously by actors in the micro level (e.g., the government) or we have ideas on how to address climate change, but [are] not given the resources/funding to mobilize."

3. Connection and Community

Youth want to learn about and take action on climate in community. It is clear that youth feel much more hopeful and empowered when working towards a common climate goal with their peers. In particular, youth asked for:

- virtual and in-person hubs, and green spaces
- safe, welcoming, non-commercial, *unpoliced* third spaces to convene (for example, libraries, community centers, and cultural hubs)
- networking, mentorship, and mechanisms to capture and retain institutional knowledge in youth climate organizing spaces

"Alienation and isolation lead to grief and doomism."

"Having others feel the same way and having an event where we can interact and be friends while working towards something that makes a difference."

4. Transit

Transit came up again and again as a key climate and justice concern from youth of all ages. There was a specific focus on the gaps in accessible transit and active transport outside of the downtown core, especially in Scarborough. In particular, youth wanted more say in transit decisions, phased out fares for students and young people, and safer and more reliable transit. They also asked for more service on Wheel-Trans and more accessible subway stations.

"Free transit for students! (a lot of us actually use it)."

"Promoting active transportation such as cycling should be accompanied with improved infrastructure to make these options viable and accessible for all residents."

5. Jobs and Skills Training

Youth want good-paying jobs and professional development, and they want to know how their jobs can connect to climate justice and build skills that will make it easier to reach their climate ambitions. Younger students want to tie climate action into their other dreams for the future. And youth of all ages asked for support for a Youth Climate Corps.

"People just know climate action and careers as involving recycling."

"[I] didn't know you could have environmentalism as a job, just thought it was a hobby."


The How

How youth want to interact with the City and how they want policies to be designed and implemented.

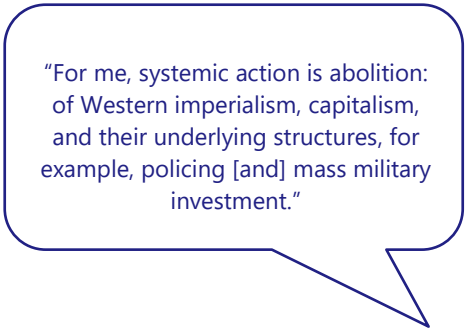
Justice, Intersectionality, and Accessibility

Youth recognize climate change as deeply connected to and driven by other systems of oppression, including colonialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia, among others. Many youth highlighted the disproportionate impacts of climate change on racialized and newcomer groups, and especially on Black and Indigenous peoples, and the need to prioritize climate engagement and policies that address and mitigate those disproportionate impacts and injustices.

Additionally, youth want climate action that centers and upholds Indigenous sovereignty. They are skeptical of corporate-driven climate action and worried about fossil fuel industry ties and misinformation. Youth with disabilities spoke about how difficult it can be to know if a climate event is accessible and a lack of accessible engagement opportunities, despite the disproportionate climate risk borne by folks with disabilities (for example, natural disasters can be especially dangerous for wheelchair users).



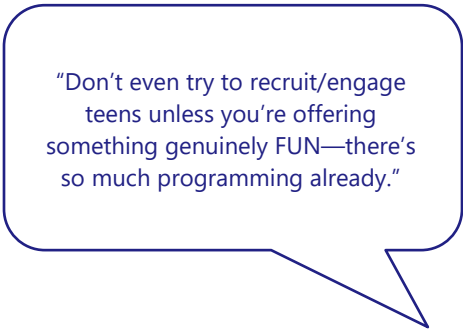
"I just wanted to say, providing spaces like this that focus on issues affecting our communities, and even issues affecting everybody but focusing on how they affect us and how we, as communities, as Indigenous and as Black folk, have protested and worked to fix them, is so important. A lot of what we learn at school is Eurocentric, even in terms of climate change."



"For me, systemic action is abolition: of Western imperialism, capitalism, and their underlying structures, for example, policing [and] mass military investment."

Incentives

Youth want any engagement or interaction with the City to be mutually generative (as opposed to feeling extractive). First and foremost, they want to be paid for their time if they're being asked to do anything resembling work. In addition to honoraria, incentives can include volunteer hours, professional development (for example, free resume help or headshots), free hearty food, networking, play, connection, sports, and skills-building.



"Don't even try to recruit/engage teens unless you're offering something genuinely FUN—there's so much programming already."

Communication and Social Media

Toronto youth expressed that they will never *feel* like the City is doing enough on climate unless the City *communicates* its actions effectively. In turn, in communicating climate initiatives effectively and explicitly to youth, the City could activate many young folks willing and able to take action who don't know where or how to start. Youth identified relationship-building and social media as the most effective communication strategies (although they stressed that most adults do not understand how to use social media well and that it's critical to amplify and platform youth and racialized creators).

Youth want deep, wide, and authentic online communication, supplemented by informal pop-ups and communication through teacher and professor networks. They do not want formality or hierarchy in City-youth engagement.

They also expressed a clear and consistent desire to break out of what they perceive as an endless engagement loop for each new City report or strategy without getting to see first-hand tangible action.

"Very few people in our target demographic have a strong understanding of the 'Net Zero by 2024' Initiative."

"Using social media to debunk narratives and get voices heard."



Image Credit: Revital Weiss

Our Recommendations



We prioritized recommendations that: (1) addressed as many youth-identified themes as effectively as possible; (2) were repeatedly identified by youth research analysts as the most important for their peers; (3) helped advance our mandate and goal of centering equity-deserving groups like newcomers, racialized youth, Black and Indigenous youth, and folks with disabilities; and (4) are within the scope of the City's power. Youth asked again and again for bold action to meet the existential stakes of the climate crisis and we worked to honour their request and vision with our recommendations while being mindful of the limitations of City power and funding. While the 10 recommendations are equal in importance and urgency, we pulled out "Climate Hubs" for recommendation 1, as supporting community climate hubs helps facilitate each of the other recommendations. Some of the recommendations may require partnerships and collaborations across sectors, and each recommendation has a series of proposed actions to begin implementation.

Recommendation 1: Climate Hubs

Fund, resource, connect, and support the development of climate hubs with a youth focus. We see climate hubs with a youth focus as responding to all of the 11 themes. There are three different types of climate hubs with a youth- focus in various stages of development in the City of Toronto, each with their own priorities and benefits.

The three types of hubs are:

- **A centralized physical space for climate organizers to convene and hold events**
 - Youth climate leaders are the backbone of municipal youth climate action in Toronto and an immense benefit to their peers and communities. But there are very few physical spaces where they can build community and hold events, especially for folks outside of high school and university.
 - The Youth Harbour has a pilot share space for youth climate leaders underway at the Centre for Social innovation.
- **A series of place-based hubs in community centers, cultural hubs, and libraries that reach youth in their communities across the City and help foster community climate resilience for all generations**
 - Rather than being climate-specific hubs, these would integrate climate programming and climate programming with a youth focus into existing community gathering places to make climate action as accessible and culturally relevant as possible.
 - These hubs could empower youth to play a key role in building out community climate resilience in the face of growing extreme weather, by, for example, telling their parents and grandparents about the existence and location of cooling centers during extreme heat.
 - Community centres and libraries could also be used for training youth for climate-related roles (for example, working in community gardens) and providing more formalized job training.
 - The Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) is collaborating with others to explore the role community hubs can have in local climate actions.

- **A community-academic climate hub**

- A community-academic climate hub could tap into the energy and passion of tens of thousands of youth in Toronto and empower students to use their research, extracurricular activities, and class assignments to support community climate action in the City.

Climate hubs could offer and host much of the programming we suggest below, allowing youth and communities to lead on justice-centered climate action while the City plays a key supporting, funding, convening, and resourcing role.

Action 1.1

Identify, resource, and connect existing community organizations that either currently offer youth-centered climate programming or would like to offer youth-centered climate programming but need more resources.

Action 1.2

Support and fund the ongoing pilots for the first two types of hubs identified above (a centralized physical space for organizers and a series of place-based hubs) and invest in a pilot for the third (a community-academic climate hub).



Image Credit: Shalen Chen

Recommendation 2: Transform youth climate engagement to bridge the gap between youth and the City

Given the existing distrust and skepticism youth feel towards institutions like the City on climate action, shift the entire engagement process to feel mutually generative by centering more targeted, deeper engagement that can be adequately compensated rather than broad and shallow engagement; and/or to delegate the engagement process to youth themselves wherever possible. Ensure that the City's youth engagement communicates an understanding of and empathy for intersectional climate action (for example, that whoever's running the engagement understands power dynamics and can speak comfortably and explicitly about race, class, gender, colonialism, ableism, queerness, and more). Explicitly acknowledge the existential stakes of climate change, especially for marginalized communities, and the misalignment between City timelines and the urgency of action.

Action 2.1

Create an internal honoraria policy for youth climate engagement (when, how, how much) and ensure that all City-youth interaction creates tangible benefits for youth.

Action 2.2

Hire youth climate groups to offer anti-oppression workshops to any City departments who would like to become more fluent in the language and vision of the youth climate justice movement.

Action 2.3

Coordinate with universities to facilitate undergraduate and graduate researchers taking on the bulk of more formal City climate engagement with youth. For example, as part of a course, a group of University of Toronto students conducted engagement with their peers and wrote a report about youth climate engagement, which informed this strategy document.

Action 2.4

Recognize the key importance of communication and social media; and hire local social media content creators (especially Black and Indigenous creators and creators connected to climate) to detail City climate policies and opportunities.

Bridging the Gap

One way for the City to bridge the gap is by linking climate to other social justice issues and advocating for them as part of climate action. Here are local intersectional climate actions youth want to see:

- Advocate for sustainable urban planning that reduces gentrification and promotes green spaces, ensuring development does not displace low-income communities or harm the environment.
- Recognize and tackle the systemic issues contributing to environmental degradation, like corporate exploitation and prioritization of profits over people.
- Convert all hydro corridors into community managed farmland.
- Provide funding to each ward individually to decide how they would like to alter their existing greenspaces, with additional funding to priority and high food-insecurity neighborhoods.
- Partner with local Indigenous and Black communities to manage and protect natural spaces, ensuring conservation efforts respect and incorporate traditional ecological knowledge.
- Safeguard sacred Indigenous lands from development and urbanization, recognizing their cultural and ecological significance.

Recommendation 3: Transit justice and food justice

Recognizing that, like all local governments, the City has limited funds and capacity, prioritize intersectional, justice-oriented climate action when deciding how to use resources. The two key examples of intersectional, justice-oriented actions requested by youth are food justice and better public and active transit. Increasing local food sovereignty and improving public and active transit have significant climate benefits, but they're also critical justice issues. About [25 percent](#) of Toronto households are affected by food insecurity, and the risk of food insecurity is higher amongst low-income groups, racialized groups, single mothers, and other marginalized individuals. Youth spoke about being late for school and struggling to build community and access programming because transit outside of the downtown core is so slow and unreliable. Explicitly naming issues like food justice and public transit as "climate" issues offers the City the opportunity to demonstrate its dedication to tangible, local, intersectional climate action. Combining the "the What" and "the How", the City should center, support, and amplify racialized-, Black-, and Indigenous-led groups tackling food sovereignty and public transit. Additionally, when creating engagements, workshops, networking, and programming, the City should prioritize equity-deserving communities as facilitators and audiences.

Action 3.1

Engage with, amplify, and support grassroots transit groups like TTC riders, and explore re-launching a body like the Toronto youth food policy council.

Action 3.2

Pilot subsidizing or phasing out youth transit fares (begin with youth from equity-deserving communities and youth outside of the downtown core).

Action 3.3

Fund and support Indigenous-led and Black-led groups focusing on food justice.

Action 3.4

Increase subsidized job and skills training for careers related to localizing Toronto's food system. This includes skills training and certification for sustainable agriculture, food distribution, and disposal.



Recommendation 4: More grants and resources for youth-led organizations

Focus on amplifying *existing* initiatives by giving more dedicated City resources to organizing, administrative, and logistical support to youth climate groups, and providing additional no-strings attached funding for youth climate groups. Youth climate groups do a herculean amount of work with minimal budgets. They are on the front lines of enacting intersectional, justice-centered climate education and action; building community resilience and connection; combating climate anxiety through collective action and giving young folks much-needed hope and agency; communicating to their peers through creative art, storytelling, and social media; building out mutual aid networks; and more. They also play a vital role as the “connective tissue” of the City’s dispersed climate actors, moving between community, academic, government, grassroots, and non-profit worlds with unique ease.

Action 4.1

Fund and administer additional small grants specifically for existing grassroots youth climate organizations and provide the grants with no strings attached.

Action 4.2

Provide in-kind support to grassroots youth climate organizations by offering City space and a portion of City staff time to support their work. City staff time could go to helping with accessibility (including translation and finding accessible spaces); graphic design needs; tech support; photography and videography, and more.

Action 4.3

Create a brief, accessible model Memorandum of Understanding that allows youth to accept funding from the City without fear of being co-opted and the City to provide funding without fear of being held responsible for youth groups’ words or actions.



Recommendation 5: Justice-centered climate education

Identify, use, support, and amplify intersectional educational materials that match how youth are thinking and talking about climate change, and that move away from describing climate action as largely a problem of individual behaviour and consumer choices and more as an issue of nested injustices, collective action, and political advocacy. Highlight examples of Indigenous and Black-led climate action and environmental stewardship.

As is a theme throughout this report, there are many amazing existing educational resources (both Toronto-specific and more general), but many educators and institutions do not know they exist or how to access them; and many of the groups creating the resources could use funding for scaling and dissemination. Climate hubs, recommended above, could play a key role in connecting resources to communities and educators. In a world of information saturation, community organizers and relational networks are absolutely critical to getting resources where they're needed most.

See the Additional Resources section for more details of what youth asked for in their climate education.

Action 5.1

Create funding and infrastructure to match educators and students with existing intersectional climate education materials. For example, Fridays for Future Toronto offered a popular climate misinformation workshop to their high school peers, and Shake Up the Establishment (a youth-led non-profit with deep ties to Toronto) offers educator workshops around their comprehensive, intersectional climate education guide. Lakeshore Arts has offered a series of arts-rich, hands-on workshops connected to climate justice. The City could play a role in amplifying such workshops by disseminating them to teachers and offering an honoraria fund to compensate groups (especially youth-, Indigenous-, and Black-led groups) for delivering their educational programming.

Action 5.2

Fund the creation and dissemination of climate education materials centering Indigenous laws and sovereignty designed specifically for youth. There are many Indigenous legal scholars teaching in the City who might be able to provide expertise.

Action 5.3

Offer youth hands-on experiences, such as planting seeds in indoor gardens, visiting local waterways, participating in community clean-up events, and engaging in tree planting and other environmental stewardship activities.



Recommendation 6: Partnerships with youth-led organizations and academic institutions

Think about youth as key partners and leaders in outreach to their families and communities across a range of municipal and justice issues. Outsource and/or delegate climate engagement and research work to youth as much as possible, and shift City resources to logistical and administrative support. The City should ask: (1) Could university and graduate research associates do this task? (2) Could youth-led, non-profit consulting groups do this task? (3) Could youth-led grassroots groups do this task or run this workshop?

It is important to note that this is not a call to exploit free student labour or to undermine unionized City workers, but rather a way to recognize and fund the exemplary work of students and youth-led organizations. This approach is also a win-win way of providing Toronto youth climate groups with more funding; and youth respond positively to learning and mentoring in peer-to-peer models. Additionally, the City should explicitly communicate and recognize its appreciation for youth leadership wherever possible. Finally, the City should run an informal internal audit of where else it might be able to integrate and support youth leadership and climate to achieve its goals. For example, we've seen youth climate groups providing job training and professional development for equity-deserving communities and newcomers; driving sustainable behavior change for their parents and grandparents; and helping with loneliness, cultural vitality, and success in school, among many other issues.

Action 6.1

Design an internal City policy for a "youth-first approach" to contracting out climate engagement and consultation (as well as other City priorities that might be integrated into climate action).

Action 6.2

Increase coordination with universities and professors to allow for students to use their class, research, and volunteer hours for meaningful City climate action. University students are often desperate to have an opportunity to use their class assignments to advance real-world, justice-centered climate action. For example, York University's Psychology Department just signed on to the 1 in 5 Project, where 1 in 5 class assignments will be dedicated to climate change.

Action 6.3

Explicitly recognize the work and impact of youth climate advocates (for example, through a celebratory event, an official statement, or an educational module) and continue to recognize the critical importance of youth leadership on climate justice going forward. This has the added benefit of showing that while youth may not be able to take consumer actions like buying EVs, they can build the political will necessary for robust City climate action.

Recommendation 7: Specific resources for racialized youth

Create and/or scale up specific grants, programs, and staff time dedicated to supporting and engaging BIPOC youth, especially Black and Indigenous youth, on climate action. Facilitate spaces and programs specifically for Indigenous and Black youth to discuss and address climate issues, ensuring these are relevant to their experiences and intriguing. Provide education on the history of Indigenous and Black communities' relationships with land and water, and the impacts of colonization and slavery.

Action 7.1

Create and scale up dedicated funding opportunities for BIPOC-led youth climate action, and make existing climate funding programs more accessible for BIPOC youth. For example, change language in funding criteria to encourage more racialized youth to apply for these funds, as they may have climate action ideas that fall outside of more traditional definitions of city climate action.

Action 7.2

Collaborate with Indigenous and Black communities to develop climate action projects that respect their traditional knowledge and practices.

Action 7.3

Organize activities that help youth connect with their ancestral lands and traditional practices, such as berry picking, planting native species, and water ceremonies.



Recommendation 8: Ease, Play, and Mental Health

Meet youth where they are in specific life stages and identify engagement opportunities that can add ease and play to their lives, and design engagement opportunities with the mental health impacts of climate change in mind.

Where do youth already hang out (both online and in-person)? What makes them feel happy or empowered or excited or connected? What are they worried about—jobs? University applications? Building out their resumes? If you can identify your target youth audience and design your programming to help young people get where they want to go faster, then you will have a much larger, more engaged, more empowered youth audience. Place-based hubs, culturally-specific programming, and mentorship models are ideal strategies to meet young folks where they are. Additionally, community groups are experts at knowing how to effectively reach their own communities.

Action 8.1

Connect with CAMH and Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario to identify best practices around youth climate engagement and mental health.

Action 8.2

Integrate climate education and action into recreation centres and athletic programming.



Image Credit: Karim Rizkallah

Case Study

Move, Play and Connect on Climate

By **Nolan Gibot**

The event, co-created by Grace Nosek and Nolan Gibot at the City of Toronto, combined sports, games, and climate conversations to foster meaningful connections and discussions. This innovative approach stemmed from the realization that many deep and impactful climate conversations often occur through play and movement. The event successfully blended athletic activities with climate engagement, creating a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere for those wanting to engage in climate conversation.

Feedback highlighted the ease of conversation, the fun and relaxed vibe provided by music, and the successful integration of diverse participants, including both climate advocates and athletes. The structured informal spaces facilitated numerous conversations, reaching individuals who might not typically engage with climate initiatives.

Student attendees appreciated the warm and welcoming environment, noting it made networking easier compared to traditional climate events. City staff found the approach refreshing, as it lightened the typically heavy climate discussions and fostered positive interactions. They noted the event effectively connected people, sparked interest in climate issues through sports, and provided a unique, engaging space for conversation.

High-level takeaways indicate that integrating sports and movement into climate discussions can alleviate the pressure of these conversations, making them more accessible and engaging. Future events could benefit from more public and accessible venues, additional interactive programming, and incorporating visuals that resonate with the target audience. Overall, this event demonstrated the potential of combining sports, play, and climate action to effectively reach and engage new audiences, fostering a sense of community and collective responsibility towards environmental sustainability.

Image Credit: Shalen Chen



Recommendation 9: Jobs and skills training

Connect climate change to jobs and skills training as often and early as possible (and connect climate to as big a diversity of jobs, skills, and interests as possible). There is a significant opportunity to frame climate action as a way for youth to build new skills, to design their ideal future work, and to support the accessibility of good-paying jobs for all. It's important to stress that all jobs and skills are going to be needed for a just climate future, including art, writing, poetry, music, and more.

Action 9.1

Partner with high schools, universities, and non- profits to provide more climate networking and climate job preparedness programming, especially for equity-deserving groups.

Action 9.2

Explore how the City can support a youth climate corps and integrate provincial and federal job funding into climate action.

Action 9.3

Create and/or amplify educational materials for young children that show all the exciting potential career paths that connect to climate and climate justice.

Recommendation 10: Mentorship

Create a mentorship program that connects youth across the City to the abundance of existing climate programming being offered. While there are many events focused on climate and social justice in Toronto, especially on university campuses, they are dispersed across the City and often in the form of one-off events. Such events are keen (often even desperate) for a larger youth audience, and simultaneously youth have asked for more workshops, education, and community-building opportunities. A mentorship program is an immediate, low-cost, low-administration action that could create a win-win where existing activities get larger and new audiences while youth get to access programming in community.

Action 10.1

Create a paid climate mentorship training program to train a cohort of youth mentors across the City, with a focus on equity-deserving communities. Universities could be ideal partners to help train mentors.

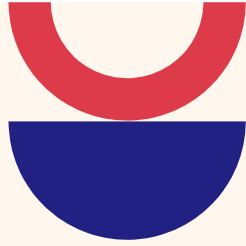
Action 10.2

Provide mentors with compensation, administrative and logistical support, and project funding, and help match them to schools, teachers, or community centers with existing groups of youth who would like mentorship.

Case Study

OK Youth! 2023-24 High School Fellowship Program

By **Miha Isik**



The OK Youth! Fellowship Program, created by Miha Isik and launched during the 2023-24 academic year, was a pilot initiative designed for Grade 10 students from equity-deserving backgrounds in Finch West. The program connected high school students with programming across the City through targeted community support, fostering a safe space where students could share experiences, build cultural identity, and connect with relatable role models who offered guidance and support. The program had two key components:

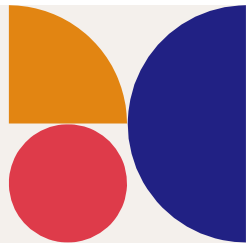
- 1. One-on-one mentorship:** Working one-on-one with a community mentor over the course of the summer, students identified their areas of interests and passions, and set personal growth, academic, and social goals. Common themes across the Grade 10 cohort included need for volunteer hours, networking experience, soft skills training, and confidence-building activities. Personalized portfolios were created to map each student's objectives and progress. The mentor held regular, relaxed coffee chats with students during the program, checking in on their well-being, discussing goals, and fostering genuine, open conversations that strengthened community bonds.
- 2. Group fellowship:** Throughout the academic year, the mentor curated a diverse menu of workshops, volunteer opportunities, and social events happening across Toronto. Each week, the students met as a cohort and chose upcoming activities that aligned with their interests as a group. The mentor then accompanied them to these events, provided on-site support, and coordinated with families through WhatsApp group chats, community calendars, and transit planning. Before each event, the mentor held friendly prep meetings to walk students through the event details—covering everything from the site layout and dress code to helpful social tips and learning goals—ensuring they felt comfortable, prepared, and confident to make the most of each experience. Each event included an 'assignment' component, and in weekly meetings, students reflected on their experiences, supported each other's insights, and provided feedback to the mentor for their portfolios.

Throughout the program, 7 students connected with more than 13 youth organizations across the City—spanning climate advocacy, community engagement, political campaigning, science and technology, and arts and culture—each accumulating over 92 volunteer hours.

The end-of-program Fellows Survey revealed that all students rated their experience highly, recommended the program to peers, and highlighted problem-solving as the top skill gained. Student participants praised the program for creating a supportive space where they could engage with social causes and explore potential career paths. One fellow noted the experience motivated her to become an 'elite student' and explore opportunities like internships and co-ops, while others enjoyed discovering new fields. Parents expressed deep gratitude, noting the program's role in building confidence, self-awareness, and a sense of purpose in their children, as it introduced them to new horizons within a warm, community-focused environment.

Key takeaways highlight that students from equity-deserving backgrounds need more than just programs—they need supportive communities. Models like the OK Youth! Fellowship provide this by creating spaces for connection and growth, especially for youth lacking access to or family support for climate activism. Expanding such models City-wide, with community mentors and parental involvement, can foster a more inclusive and engaged climate movement.

Conclusion



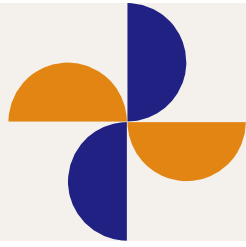
It was a profound honour for our team to learn from more than 800 Toronto youth about how the City of Toronto can best support their climate action. Our engagement pilot with community partner CCNCTO phrased it best, “We recognize that youth are experts of their own experiences, and already hold the knowledge and capabilities to advocate for and create their desired futures.”

This report is designed to honour the knowledge and vision of Toronto youth and to create a roadmap to resource them as powerfully as possible in the years ahead. Our team at the University of Toronto is excited to continue supporting the implementation of this strategy going forward.

“With regards to motivation, before the [engagement] session, I did feel a bit pessimistic with climate change but now seeing that change is possible through youth, it created a spark to reignite my passion and dedication for climate change.”



Additional Resources



We received so many rich suggestions and details from youth and practitioners around education and hubs that we've included an additional section preserving those suggestions as potential guides for implementation by the City or other institutions.

We also created a series of arts-based resources and outputs, as well as additional documents focused on specific research topics (like food and climate justice, and an accountability model for City-youth relationships). You can find the following resources linked on the Youth Climate Action in Toronto website and/or the City of Toronto website:

- [Ayesha Ali, Ibtesaam Mohamed Afroz Moosa, Erum Naqvi, Zoha Sojoudi, Imara Ajani Rolston, "Just and Accountable Futures: Developing a Proposed Climate Policy Accountability Approach for the City of Toronto" \(Reach Alliance, 2024\)](#)
- ["Youth for Food-Climate Justice Podcast"](#)
- ["Airborne Avengers Assemble: An Interactive Climate Audio Experience"](#) (a joyful, interactive audio experience to help kids learn about and feel empowered to help pollinators and ecosystems geared towards kids and classrooms under 10)
- ["Youth Dreaming and Designing Relations to Lands and Waters"](#) The Henceforward podcast, episode 30

EDUCATION

Below we've included a series of additional, more detailed pieces of feedback and recommendations around climate education that we heard from Toronto youth and experts in youth climate engagement.

- Incorporate current issues and examples that relate to youths' lives when teaching about climate change.
- Education and engagement should be thoughtfully tailored to reach both those already very involved, and those who are not yet engaged. One key way to meet those who are not already engaged is to broaden the boundaries around grants and programs for climate action to be more expansive for groups to utilize climate education and programming in the ways that feel most relevant for their youth community.
- Design educational programs that explore water as a source of life and its sovereignty, including activities that track changes to local waterways over time.
- Design programs that emphasize the reciprocal relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. Encourage practices that support this relationship, such as controlled burns for ecosystems like Black Oak Savannas, tree planting, and establishing native seed banks.
- Teach consent and care in environmental practices. Develop workshops that teach youth how to harvest plant relatives with consent and care.

- Develop programs that encourage holistic relationships with land and water, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of caring for all our relations.
- Establish programs that empower young people to engage in climate justice activities, such as art contests, workshops for creating protest signs, and interviews to share youth perspectives on climate change.
- Teach youth not only how to advocate effectively but also who to advocate to. Youth asked for clearer guidance on the roles and responsibilities at different levels of government—municipal, provincial, and federal—so they can connect with the right policymakers and stakeholders.
- Partner with arts-focused programs and schools (for example, OCAD and Humber) to create experiential learning opportunities for arts students to create materials for the City’s climate campaigns and to mentor younger students in the arts programming they so crave.
- Incorporate play and movement into educational opportunities for all ages. For example, we designed an interactive audio experience, “Airborne Avengers Assemble,” to be used in gym classes, so youth can feel powerful, joyful, and forward-moving as they learn about climate change. Another example could be walking tours pointing out different kinds of climate issues and solutions across the City with a partner like Let’s Hike T.O.
- Create educational opportunities that are year-round and that build off one another so that students can increasingly up their skills, leadership, and engagement.
- Ensure younger students are taught about intersectional and systemic climate action, not just individual climate action.
- Support the creation of “climate coaches” at schools and universities across Toronto who can help connect youth to climate education and job opportunities while being mindful of mental health.
- Support the creation of climate curricula that incorporate the history of Toronto’s other social justice movements (For example, youth highlighted the work of youth-led non-profit Shake Up The Establishment in creating similar resources).
- Use TTC subway posters as a way to educate folks on the City’s current climate work and opportunities, to thank youth for their impact on the City, and to welcome them into next steps.
- Teach young people how to create effective visual media using powerful imagery, concise language, and a focus on specific issues or solutions.

HUBS

Below we've included a series of additional, more detailed pieces of feedback and recommendations around climate hubs that we heard from Toronto youth and experts in youth climate engagement.

Hubs, third spaces, and food justice

- Increase the amount of non-commercial neighborhood gathering spaces for people to cook, eat, and spend time together. These spaces should also include growing and composting spaces, as well as be climate controlled year-round. Increase community agency in decision-making for the use and organization of neighborhood spaces and introduce financial compensation for managing their community spaces.
- Reduce policing in existing community spaces and decriminalize use of space.
- Hubs could help disperse city funding to youth through more relational and accessible funding pathways.
- **Examples of accessible strategies include:**
 - (1) replacing formal written applications with more informal interviews and face-to-face zoom meetings;
 - (2) having a zoom meeting (instead of a very detailed written expense report) post- event/program with city staff/climate hub staff to share how it went; and
 - (3) creating the ability for youth to receive funds up front, instead of receiving funds at a later point in time after submitting receipts.

How hubs might work together

- The three models of climate hubs described above could work together in synergistic ways
- **The three types of hubs are:**
 - A centralized physical space for climate organizers to convene and hold events
 - A series of place-based hubs in community centers, cultural hubs, and libraries that reach youth in their communities across the city and help foster community climate resilience for all generations
 - A community-academic climate hub
- **Examples of potential synergies include:**
 - **Mentorship**
 - The City could design/fund a mentorship program anchored at different place-based hubs across the city so that youth can easily reach resources in their neighborhoods and build community.
 - The central hub could provide a centralized gathering space for climate workshops and events open to mentees from all across the city (where youth could feel part of a city-wide community), as well as connecting youth mentor pods to funding opportunities, specific training, shareable resources, etc.
 - The community-academic hub could fund research assistant positions for university undergraduate and graduate students to either be the mentors or to support the mentors and mentees with their projects and events.

- With enough resources, mentors could lead cohorts in municipal climate action projects and help with professional development and skills-training as they complete projects.
- Mentor groups could also be interest- specific, for example focused on “sports and climate action” to reach new groups of youth.

Visions for a community-academic climate hub

We heard some suggestions on what kind of programming a community-academic climate hub could offer and what a hub could look like, including:

- “A community-focused art and climate research shop” where university students support community groups with their art, media, and research needs.
- One key model example is [The 312 Main Research Shop](#) run by the Community Engaged Research Initiative at SFU. This community- academic hub “solicit[s] projects from community organizations, then hire[s] SFU graduate students to engage in, lead, or contribute to community- driven research projects, gaining hands-on experience and enhancing their professional development. SFU CERi manages and facilitates the process from start to finish.”
- Cascading mentorship at a community-academic climate hub
 - Over and over youth raised a desire for mentorship, and for supporting their younger peers. We’ve seen how encouraging young folks to step into a mentorship role makes them feel like agents of change rather than more passive victims of a warming world. We’ve also heard high school and middle school teachers note how much even their students enjoyed mentoring younger students (for example, grade 5 students mentoring grade 2 students).
 - A community-academic climate hub could help create the infrastructure for a ‘cascading mentorship’ model where graduate students help mentor undergraduate students who help mentor high school students, and so on).
 - OISE and TDSB eco-schools could be key partners.

References



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