

Regional Growth Strategy

Youth Engagement Strategy



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Regional District of North Okanagan Regional Growth Strategy

Youth Engagement Strategy

Introduction

Youth engagement is a key element of the Participation Plan, targeting the youth demographic that does not normally get involved in the planning process. Youth and students are a key underrepresented group within the participation process and this group will inherit the Regional Growth Strategy policies and strategies that will be developed. Targeted effort must be advanced to ensure that youth perspectives, issues, and regional future vision are reflected in the final product. Youth participation strategies may include:

- Develop presentation materials that is geared toward youth and has a strong interactive component;
- The development and/or attendance of a series of events that target youth, with at least one session per phase of the project, to provide a forum for input into the RGS process; and
- Development of a plan that targets youth where that learn and synchronizes with the educational criteria and curriculum at the high school and collage levels, linking other outreach opportunities outlined above.
- Development of a series of youth (under the age of 25) contests that will compliment other youth engagement activities.

The Regional Growth Strategy Process

To help ensure that the Regional Growth Strategy is completed with adequate participation among all key stakeholders, the participation process will employ a variety of active and passive information and input methods and tools over the three major phases.

Phase I: Building a Foundation

General participation activities during this phase will begin with an Elected Officials' Forum that will refine the direction of the Regional Growth Strategy and communication materials with a focus introducing the Regional Growth Strategy process.

Other participation activities include a public information session, Intergovernmental Advisory Committee meetings, First Nations participation activities, Growth Issues Working Groups' meetings, and various communications activities. The results of this phase will be presented in a Phase I Summary Report.

Phase II: Planning, Analysis, Evaluation, and Trade-offs

Participation activities during this phase will include extensive communications activities, a public survey, Elected Officials' Forum, continued meetings of the Growth Issues Working Groups, and Intergovernmental Advisory Committee meetings. As well, a series of public open houses, additional events, and an open

invitation for written comments throughout the RGS process will provide numerous opportunities for regional residents' participation. The input from these participation activities will be used in selecting and developing a preferred growth option and Regional Growth Strategy policies. The results of this phase will be presented in a Phase II Summary Report.

Phase III: Regional Growth Strategy Preparation, Negotiation, Acceptance, and Adoption

The final phase of the Regional Growth Strategy project will include continued communication activities, as well as an Elected Officials' Forum, a public information session, Intergovernmental Advisory Committee meetings, and a well-publicized formal public hearing.

The Participation Plan

Widespread Community Participation is essential to envisioning a common future and an understanding of our management of growth contained within the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS). Working meaningfully together, in a collaborative and cooperative way, through a process informed by regional residents, First Nations, local governments, elected officials, provincial and federal agencies, and interested stakeholders, will ensure that that our shared vision will be defined through capturing the diverse perspectives and interests present within the Region. Meaningful participation throughout every phase of the process is essential to successful development of the Regional Growth Strategy and building the trust and relationships necessary for implementation.

The purpose of this Participation Plan is to guide the work of the North Okanagan Regional District (RDNO) Board of Directors as it gathers input and feedback for use in the development of a Regional Growth Strategy. As required by the Section 855 (2) of the *Local Government Act*, the RDNO will provide opportunities for extensive, early, and ongoing public participation with residents, stakeholders, local governments, First Nations, and other government agencies.

The goals of the Participation Plan are to ensure widespread and meaningful participation within the Regional Growth Strategy process and to maintain focus on the issues that the broader community identifies as most important, to develop regional vision; goals, objectives and strategies that will help develop informed decisions about the desired future of the Region.

The four broad goals of the Participation Plan are to:

- Ensure that **all** communities, residents and stakeholders in the North Okanagan have an opportunity to gain an understanding of the process and be able to provide input into it;
- Communicate to raise awareness about the Regional Growth Strategy, facilitate interest and discussion on growth management issues and priorities, and inform about opportunities to participate;
- Gather input and feedback through a variety of means, including public meetings, elected officials' forums, surveys and other methods of participation; and
- Present input and feedback in a manner that informs the development of the Regional Growth Strategy.

Why is Youth Engagement in the Regional Growth Strategy Important?

What empowers a community — where ordinary people create better places, transform their own and others' lives while solving the public problems of the day? In recent years planning has made great strides in mobilizing broad participation, incorporating a diversity of interests and stakeholder groups of different cultural and economic backgrounds and ages.

Youth provide a unique and fresh voice to the dialogue. In a growing number of circumstances, children and youth are taking a more active role in shaping their communities.

Youth engagement has taken many forms. Often youth will be involved throughout the planning process, where young people participate as a constituent group. The ideal planning process is when these goals are met:

- Young people have multiple opportunities to speak about the issues that concern them.
- They experience a sense of satisfaction about their participation.
- They know they have had real influence over issues that are critical to improving the quality of life in their communities.

Initiatives to encourage youth involvement are greatly served by recognizing the importance that interpersonal relationships play in enriching the lives of young people. Youth engagement programs are more successful when the participants are surrounded by supportive relationships. These relationships play a significant role in how quickly a young person grasps the larger context for community problem solving. Group activities and activities in the classroom will encourage participation within the process and provide avenues for input.

Defining Youth Engagement

There are many different perspectives on what youth engagement is, the ways in which youth show their involvement or engagement, and why they become engaged (or fail to become engaged) in the first place. Youth engagement basically means young people who are actively and authentically involved, motivated and excited about an issue, process, event or program.

And a large amount of research has been compiled and summarized by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE, a national project funded in part by Health Canada, who recently posted the results of a youth survey that summarized some key elements of engaging youth.

Youth are engaged if...

- They are respected, valued, trusted, feel appreciated, safe and comfortable.
- They feel they are working in a youth friendly environment and are involved in a meaningful way.
- Their voices are being heard.
- They are given the chance to be involved and make decisions, gain leaderships skills and see their ideas realized.
- There's a social aspect to their involvement.
- They see change and progress happening.
- Their imaginations are touched and they are valued.

Rationale for Engaging Youth

Youth are active and contributing members of society now, not future citizens or leaders of tomorrow, as they are referred to by many adult leaders. Nationwide research funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (2000) revealed one of the most consistent concerns of youth is that their voices are not heard, respected, or taken seriously by adults. In a Health Canada Report, 51% of teenagers said they were rarely or never listened to).

The strong desire of youth to participate is the most compelling rationale for engaging youth in strategic planning. Other rationale includes:

- **Youth participation benefits communities.** Young people's energy, creativity, unique perspectives, and propensity for action lead to positive, beneficial change in organizations, communities and nations.
- **Youth participation benefits governments.** Municipal leaders regularly make decisions, shape policies and take action on issues that directly affect youth, i.e. public transport, parks and recreation, use of public spaces, health, child care, education, housing, etc... Youth are the foremost experts on their experiences, needs, and interactions with local environments and their community. Engaging youth in decision-making processes helps governments make decisions that are more responsive and appropriate to youth needs and interests.

Principals of Youth Participation

The overall methodology for the Youth Engagement Strategy was designed based on the following principles:

- At the earliest possible opportunity, young people will be involved within the Regional Growth strategy participation process.
- Resources and tools will be developed/provided as the need, contingent on staff resources arose so that no time or energy was wasted in devising tools that were not needed; and
- Meaningful input, insight, and comments must be encouraged throughout the Youth Engagement process, with emphasis on building interest and momentum.

Youth Participation Goals

Youth provide a unique and fresh voice to the dialogue. In a growing number of circumstances, children and youth are taking a more active role in shaping their communities. Youth engagement takes many forms. The Goals of the Youth Engagement Strategy for the Regional Growth Strategy are:

- Young people have multiple opportunities to speak about the issues that concern them.
- They experience a sense of satisfaction about their participation.
- They know they have had real influence over issues that are critical to improving the quality of life in their communities.
- They become genuine partners in the planning, design, and decision making.

Youth engagement programs are more successful when the participants are surrounded by supportive relationships. These relationships play a significant role in how quickly a young person grasps the larger context for community problem solving.

Youth Participation Activities

Educational Institutions

Schools have a large role to play in encouraging young people's civic engagement. In the classroom, the prescribed learning outcomes established by the BC Ministry of Education define the parameters of education.

Several measures support the nurturing of young people's civic engagement. For example, in all grades, the Social Studies curriculum provides guidelines for the practice of active citizenship. Also, in 2005, the Ministry of Education introduced Civic Studies in Grade 11 with an aim to enhance students' abilities and willingness to participate actively and responsibly in civic life. Participation in the Regional Growth Strategy through classroom exercises and/or activities would provide an opportunity for youth in our community to offer their input into the process at various key stages

Community Initiatives

Individual teachers generally initiate the involvement of students in their community. Youth organizations sometimes support projects, such as the greening of school grounds. Evergreen and the EYA, for instance, have been working with schools and students for the past 15 years to plant gardens and enhance school grounds. Through these projects, young people learn about building healthy communities. Enhancing young people's capacity to affect change through small but tangible projects supports young people's civic engagement.

Fulton High School's Global Education Program (School District #22), at the student, instructor and organizer levels, have shown great interest in participating in the Youth Engagement Strategy, both within and outside of the classroom. The current class, in collaboration with the City of Vernon's Youth Engagement Coordinator, led a community mapping project that captured the assets and barriers within their community. The passion and energy of this program, as well as others that wish to participate, would provide a youth-based forum to discuss the issues that are important to them and innovative suggestions that would provide insight during the Regional Growth Strategy Process.

Communication Initiatives

The development of a Youth Engagement Strategy will require an on-line, web-based presence. As proposed in the Participation Plan, an on-line forum (moderated or non-moderated), as well as a presence on social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and/or MySpace may be a possibility. Other strategic planning initiatives, such as the Comox Valley Sustainability Plan, Kelowna 2030: Greening our Future, and the Regional District of Nanaimo Regional Growth Strategy Review (Shaping Our Future), have used some of these on-line social messaging tools to reach a broader audience. As well, the last presidential election used on-line social networking tools to great effect. The YouthView webpage, on the Regional Growth Strategy webpage, will be dedicated to youth events, input and activities. Youth are also encouraged to develop their own online tools to discuss their future and the issues that matter to them.

Public Outreach Initiatives

The development of display materials and attendance at key North Okanagan events will be Regional Growth Strategy essential educational and input activities. The Participation Plan discusses a

comprehensive communication strategy and a series of planned events with a Regional District presence may be scheduled throughout the process, contingent upon Regional District resources.

These events would provide an opportunity to educate and inform the youth and the public about the Regional Growth Strategy, as well as provide a method for engagement and input through activities. These events will occur throughout the Regional District.

Youth Contests

The goal of youth engagement activities until, alternate scenarios are assessed, should be to provide opportunities for focused input on growth issues (positive and negative aspects, as well as youth values and perspectives on these issues) and what is their vision of the North Okanagan may look like. Although youth engagement activities may not always be quantifiable, the results can be dramatic, unexpected, and represent perspectives on communities, issues, and future direction that may not have been considered.

A series of youth competitions will focus on their vision of the North Okanagan, what issues matter to them and why, and what they would like to see in the future. The submissions will provide valuable insight into the growth issues and potential future preferences present a great opportunity. The Regional District of Comox Valley is currently undertaking a similar youth engagement endeavour for their Sustainability Strategy.

The winners of the contests, as well as several other entries, will have their submissions placed on the RGS Youthview website, at an Open House/Information Session, and in a press release. The information collected from these contests will be forwarded to the working groups and the Regional Board for information and consideration, as well as placed within a colourful and informative Summary Document.