



Summary Meeting Notes: Advancing Youth Engagement in Municipal Climate Action, March 1, 2022

Meeting Objective:

- **Understand opportunities available to engage more youth in municipal climate action and discuss the next steps to advance those opportunities**
- **Share findings and learnings from interviews and consultation with youth groups**

Background

The youth are an important part of our future, and unfortunately, they will be the ones impacted the most by climate change. The youth play a key role in helping to address climate change, and their engagement with the government is critical because they help keep the government accountable.

Introduction

There is often a lower voter turnout among the youth compared to seniors. This is because the youth are a demographic that traditionally does not vote in high percentages resulting in consultation bias and subsequent bias in how engagement is termed.

Discussions

Having access to municipal staff, having paid positions within the municipalities, and connecting youth groups with existing community groups are some ways to advance youth engagement. Reaching out to the youth groups and using popular social media platforms may be critical in meaningfully engaging the youth. Some popular youth groups include Environmental Youth Alliance, Canadian Youth Climate Coalition and Youth Climate Collective. The social platforms popular with the youth include Instagram and Tik Tok.

On the other hand, one of the main challenges that the municipal staff face when reaching out to the youth is having short-term thinking that coincides with election year when it comes to the implementation of the municipal climate action. The youth may require a longer-term strategy with messaging that speaks to their values and their future in a long-term perspective because, after all, they are the generation that will face the ramifications of climate change over time.

The youth can and should engage beyond community consultations, however, voting is not the only way that they can engage in municipal consultation and engagement opportunities. Tracking climate actions plans can also help advance youth engagement opportunities. Undoubtedly, climate action is so broad, but it can be narrowed down to specific implementation actions. These actions can be tracked by publishing newsletters or through a rating system where the youth give their municipalities a report card on their performance. Some municipal reports have climate implication sections, but this practice is not consistent because it is difficult to quantify or track the climate implications.

While engaging the youth may be a new area for most municipalities, it is important to have extremely coordinated efforts with clear and concise asks to the youth. This is because the youth are already exhausted from being asked to provide their input on a lot of things, and municipalities would not want the risk of driving the youth away with unclear, complicated or confusing asks.

Conclusion

Municipalities are at the start of a long-term journey that involves working with the youth who are instrumental in driving decision-makers to take strong climate action. After all, engaging with the youth helps to maintain momentum and can help alleviate municipal climate staff depression. Some of the groups that would be instrumental in helping municipalities connect with the youth are Co-op students. Municipalities can start youth engagement by asking their co-op students how they and their peers would like to be engaged.

Next steps: To do

- Find out if municipalities have annual intern positions. So far, the City of St. Catharines has though there was no budget for that in 2022.
- Ask municipalities that have hired co-op students/ interns, and if there is an opportunity to bring them as a focus group to collate their input and intel and discuss it as a collective among the municipal networks.