

# **Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement**

## **Synthesis Report**

**Charting the Course for Youth  
Civic and Political Participation**

**Mary Pat MacKinnon  
Sonia Pitre  
Judy Watling**

CPRN Research Report  
October 2007



# **Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement**

## ***Synthesis Report***

***Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation***

**Mary Pat MacKinnon, Sonia Pitre and Judy Watling**

**In collaboration with  
Tim Lobsinger**

**October 2007**

---

**Canadian Policy Research Networks**

214 – 151 Slater Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H3  
Tel: 613-567-7500 Website: [www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org)

## Dedication

CPRN's journey leading to this synthesis paper on youth civic and political engagement has been motivated by the young people who have participated in our *2005 National Dialogue and Summit on Engaging Young Canadians*, our workshops, roundtables and advisory groups. We have been inspired by their energy and passion for issues that are critical to Canada's well-being. We offer these young people our sincere respect and gratitude, and we dedicate this research to them.

This synthesis paper was prepared for CPRN's Democratic Renewal Series, *Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation*. All six research papers and this synthesis report are available on the CPRN website at [www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org). The six papers are listed below.

1. *A Group Apart: Young Party Members in Canada* – Lisa Young and William Cross
2. *Indifferent or Just Different? The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada* – Brenda O'Neill
3. *The Meaning of Political Participation for Indigenous Youth* – Taiaiake Alfred, Jackie Price and Brock Pitawanakwat
4. *Rendre compte et soutenir l'action bénévole des jeunes* – André Thibault, Patrice Albertus and Julie Fortier
5. *The State and Potential of Civic Learning in Canada* – Kristina R. Llewellyn, Sharon Cook, Joel Westheimer, Luz Alison Molina Girón and Karen Suurtamm
6. *"What Do You Mean I Can't Have a Say?" Young Canadians and Their Government* – André Turcotte

**Contents**

**Foreword ..... iii**  
**Executive Summary ..... v**  
**Acknowledgements ..... viii**

**1. Introduction: Setting the Context and Framing the Questions ..... 1**  
**2. What We Learned ..... 5**  
**3. Making Space for Youth at the Citizenship Table: Policy Directions and Levers ..... 18**  
**4. What We Need to Learn: A Research Agenda ..... 32**  
**5. Translating Youth Engagement: Connecting Youth, Politics and Policy ..... 41**

**References ..... 43**

**Appendix 1. Project Advisory Group ..... 47**  
**Appendix 2. Workshop Participants – March 7, 2007 ..... 48**  
**Appendix 3. Roundtable Participants – May 16, 2007 ..... 50**

**Tables**

**Table 1. Research Papers ..... 2**  
**Table 2. Summary of Policy Directions and Actions ..... 30**  
**Table 3. Summary of Research Questions and Priorities ..... 38**



## Foreword

When we connect with what matters to young people using language and concepts they understand, they engage. Generation Y (those born after 1979) has been told “to act locally and think globally,” that “less is more,” and that “small is beautiful.” They have been prodded to “be the change you want to see.” They were also warned that there’s no free lunch and they must be prepared to change jobs and retool throughout their working lives. So, we should not be surprised that youth have tended to reframe engagement in more individual and less institutional terms.

The message emerging from this research series on youth civic and political participation is clear: today’s young people are not disengaged from associational and small “p” political life but are increasingly disenchanted with formal political institutions and practices. Most care very deeply about issues that affect broader society – from the local to the global level – and many of them are engaged in various ways. How young people think and talk about their civic and political engagement is different from previous generations. Unfortunately, much of this is not captured by traditional research methods and academic discourse about what constitutes political participation. In this sense, their engagement is misunderstood or misrepresented. It seems to get lost in translation between the old and the new – traditional notions of civic and political engagement and youth ideas and actions.

It is also clear that disaffection with formal politics is not unique to the younger generation, but rather part of a broader challenge facing democracies today – at home and abroad. We have to be careful not to blame young people for their own marginalization from politics. Youth feel disconnected and are alienated from the political process partly because their issues don’t seem to be on the political agenda. Perhaps parties’ agendas don’t emphasize youth relevant policy in their platforms because young adults are less likely to vote. It is a vicious cycle.

One thing is certain: the civic and political engagement of youth will not improve if we persist in an institutional mindset that insists that young people must conform to the traditional political system. We must start with an honest assessment of existing democratic institutions and practices and a willingness to refurbish them to become more relevant to the needs and expectations of both young people and the broad population. As so aptly stated by Westheimer and Cook (2005), “Democracy is not self-winding.” Investing in youth is a pre-requisite to maintaining a strong democracy, and Canada needs the talents and passion of all of its generations. All of us – young people and older adults – must open our minds, revisit our definitions and diversify our research tools. By finding common language and fashioning new ways of engaging together, as Canadians, we can realize a more just, prosperous and caring Canada.



## Executive Summary

Today's youth are turned off by the game of partisan politics and increasingly refuse to learn or apply the rules. In large measure, they are reinventing civic and political engagement. Unfortunately, their discourse is all too often either not understood or poorly captured by traditional surveys, academic research and their Baby Boomer parents. In this sense, their ideas and actions are misunderstood or misrepresented. They seem to get lost in translation between the new and the old – between their perspectives and traditional notions about political and civic engagement.

*Lost in Translation* elaborates on this message. The report synthesizes key learnings from CPRN's six commissioned papers and its dialogues/workshops and research on youth<sup>1</sup> engagement. All of the research has involved young people directly, as authors, critics, and subjects of research, as well as many seasoned analysts of political participation. The papers explore different facets of youth civic and political participation in order to create a composite picture of their attitudes and experiences. Building from this evidence, the report sets out policy directions and actions to prepare young people for active citizenship. It also identifies a research agenda to address gaps in knowledge about youth civic and political participation. It concludes with a call for deeper intergenerational discourse to move from meanings that are "lost in translation" to shared language and the identification of fresh approaches to strengthen the civic and political life of Canada.

## What We Learned

The report organizes its findings about youth engagement into three broad categories: *sociological factors* (socio-economic status, childhood socialization, life cycle and generational effects, gender, and knowledge, skills and participation), *psychological factors* (identity, interest, efficacy, duty) and *institutional factors* (governments, political parties, educational institutions and civil society). The profile of youth participation that emerges is complex, sometimes contradictory or contested, and ultimately incomplete. But the parameters are clear: today's youth (sometimes called "Generation Y," which refers to those born after 1979) have less formal political knowledge than previous generations and yet are highly suspicious of political spin and insincerity. Despite having more formal education than their elders, many of them don't grasp how governments and political institutions work nor do they get the connections between their everyday lives and politics. Only one in 20 Canadians between 18 and 30 years of age (in 2000) had ever belonged to a political party, compared with one-third of those over age 60. And, as is well publicized, today's youth are much less likely to vote than other Canadians. While older generations across the western world also exhibit disaffection from formal politics, it is even more acute among youth.

---

<sup>1</sup> In general, CPRN's dialogues and workshops have engaged young people aged 18 to 25. The authors of the six papers used roughly similar age groupings, though some included 15- to 18-year-olds and/or 25- to 30-year-olds as well.

Although less politically literate than previous generations, members of Generation Y are knowledgeable and sophisticated in many ways. For instance, they are quick to apply online tools and networks to mobilize socially and politically, but often do not identify their activities as being political. They are very impatient with traditional ways of political engagement – they are turned off by political parties and partisan politics, dislike hierarchical approaches to organization and mobilization, and don't think that formal politics is an effective route to affect change. They use the marketplace to practise consumer citizenship and turn to boycotts and buycotts as forms of political expression. This generation is much more wired, getting more of its news and information online and from alternative sources, rather than mainstream media. These youth are more likely than older Canadians to participate in political demonstrations, to volunteer and to be a member of a group or organization. They volunteer for different activities and are motivated by different reasons (e.g. reciprocal relationships, skills development, social purposes). They look for engagement that has personal meaning and delivers faster results than traditional routes.

Today's youth are not disengaged from associational and small "p" political life but are increasingly disenchanted with formal political institutions and practices. Most care deeply about issues that affect society – from the local to the global – and many of them are engaged in various ways. The ways in which young people think about and discuss politics and engagement are very different from their baby boomer parents.

## **What Needs To Be Done**

Guided by a belief in the importance of enabling youth to find and articulate their voice, secure a sense of belonging, establish their identity and learn citizenship through participation, the report maps directional actions to help achieve this. Preparing youth for active citizenship requires the collaboration of educational institutions, governments, political parties, politicians, families, the community sector and youth themselves. But this is not about simply transferring knowledge from one generation to another – **rather, it is about embracing youth as co-creators and partners in renewing civil and democratic life in Canada.**

As young people reflect on their civic and political roles, it is clear that many of them must first find their own identity as a Canadian. This is especially true for Indigenous youth and for newcomers to Canada. They need opportunities to practice being a citizen – through discussion and debate, at home, in schools and in their own and broader communities. Out of this experience, they begin to develop a sense of efficacy and a growing sense of belonging.

Key initiatives include these:

- Launch a civic literacy strategy that positions reframed, revitalized and diversified citizenship education as a key plank.
- Democratize governance (adopt more participatory methods, lessen executive control).
- Create a federal ministerial portfolio for youth policy and programs.
- Renew political parties (reach out to youth, democratize party structures and practices).
- Realign community sector engagement strategies (tailor opportunities to youth interests).

- Leverage community organizations' trusted status to raise youth civic literacy and engagement.
- Start at home: mobilize families as agents and role models.
- Challenge youth to exercise their voice, improve media/political literacy, balance personal and collective needs and expectations, and develop patience.

## What We Need to Learn: A Research Agenda

The report also identifies research gaps, limitations and challenges. A research agenda, motivated by the desire to build and mobilize knowledge to inform policy interventions and action, is laid out. These research priorities include the following:

- Probe motivations for voting (and not voting), identifying effective incentives to increase turnout.
- Identify promising and best practices for citizenship teaching, including comparative work.
- Study the impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) on civic literacy and engagement.
- Unpack youth diversity to identify the commonalities and differences among various subgroups (ethno-cultural youth, young women, Indigenous youth, those with disabilities, religious groups, etc.).
- Make use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and treat them as complements, and create longitudinal datasets.
- Re-examine and expand definitions of participation and clarify concepts.
- Discover the connections between formal and informal participation.

## Conclusion

**Youth are not disconnected from politics; it is political institutions, practice and culture that are disconnected from youth.** And yet when we listen carefully to young people, we see that they have not given up on democracy. We need to redirect public energy from a fixation on getting youth to vote, and conforming to traditional ways of doing politics, to find constructive and respectful ways of co-creating a better politics to serve political and civic society. Given their heterogeneity, there can be no single way to engage youth. However there are good criteria for successful engagement (e.g., participatory methods, engage them on their turf, focus on relevant issues), the most important of which is to treat them with respect. They deserve no less than meaningful opportunities to discover what citizenship means to them by developing and applying interest, knowledge, values, and skills as full participating citizens.

Welcoming youth as co-creators of and partners in our collective life is essential if democracy is to be strengthened.

## Acknowledgements

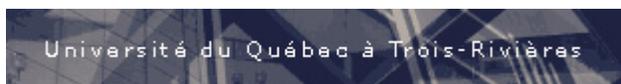
We would like to thank the authors of the six papers in this series. It has been a pleasure to work with each of them. We would also like to thank the people who volunteered to serve on the Project Advisory Group. Their insight and wisdom has contributed greatly to this series. Our appreciation is also extended to Judith Maxwell, Peter MacLeod, Eileen Saunders and Ilona Dougherty who kindly reviewed the draft paper – your comments helped strengthen it. Special thanks go to the young people who were part of our March 2007 workshop and who generously shared their experiences and ideas about participation with each other, the authors and CPRN. Their input helped to ground the research and challenged us all to think more deeply. We would also like to thank the participants of the May 2007 Roundtable. The great diversity of perspectives and knowledge that surfaced at the Roundtable provided valuable insights and gave all of us much to reflect on in applying the research to future work.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank recent political science graduate, Tim Lobsinger, who made a significant contribution to the analysis for this synthesis paper and provided a valuable youth perspective throughout.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the following financial and in-kind contributors:

- Laidlaw Foundation
- Elections Canada
- Human Resources and Social Development Canada
- Government of Saskatchewan, Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation
- Canadian Council on Learning
- Government of Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat
- Fireweed Democracy
- Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire (LLVC), Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, in collaboration with la Table de concertation des Forums jeunesse régionaux du Québec

Your contributions made this research series possible.



# Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement

## 1. Introduction: Setting the Context and Framing the Questions

### The Impetus for Exploring Youth Civic and Political Participation in Canada

The experience of our National Dialogue and Summit on Engaging Young Canadians in November 2005 whetted our appetites to learn more about how young Canadians (18 to 25 years of age) are experiencing and influencing political and civic life today.<sup>2</sup> It heightened our desire to find ways of addressing the barriers that impede their meaningful and full participation in public life. The 144 randomly recruited youth who participated in the Dialogue presented a Janus-like picture: youth are poised to engage on an array of important public issues and have a lot to contribute. Like Janus, Roman god of the gates, they represent the middle ground between adolescence and adulthood and symbolize change and transitions. They look to the future but are also shaped and influenced by their past experiences. They are not apathetic; however, they do feel alienated from the political system.<sup>3</sup> They also have difficulty connecting the issues they care about with formal politics, know little about how to use the formal system to effect the changes they want and are much less likely to vote and engage in formal politics than previous generations.<sup>4</sup>

This failure of translation – our failure to help them translate their everyday realities into the language and concepts of policy and government – is worrisome on a number of levels. First, democracy is seriously weakened when a majority of its younger citizens do not vote and do not perceive political avenues as effective routes for change. We cannot afford to be blasé about the consequences. Secondly, this misalignment runs a high risk that public policies will not reflect their needs and expectations. Thirdly, it points to serious questions about how well families, schools, and civic and political institutions have prepared them for active citizenship.

At the same time, dissatisfaction with our democratic systems is hardly unique to younger generations. In fact, they are less deeply cynical than older generations. When given meaningful opportunity to engage, their alienation can be overcome. With a better understanding of the connections between politics and their everyday lives, their sense of efficacy increases and they bring their energy and enthusiasm to effect real change.

We are also very aware that the picture of youth civic and political participation is incomplete and at times out of focus. There is still much to learn about the nature, complexity and implications of youth participation. All too often there seems to be unwillingness or inability on the part of older and younger generations to translate concepts and discourse about participation into language each can understand. CPRN's desire to fill in some of the research gaps about

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Dialogue and Summit, see CPRN( 2006) MacKinnon and Watling (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Pippa Norris (2002: 2) argues that youth are “either apathetic (at best) or alienated (at worst)” from the political system (in O’Neill, 2007: 3).

<sup>4</sup> Voters below the age of 30 are significantly less likely to go to the polls (below 40%) than those over the age of 45 (over 70%). Turcotte (2007) notes that, while discrepancies in estimates about youth voting arise, no studies suggest that there was a surge in turnout between 2004 and 2006.

youth participation and to mobilize knowledge to better support youth to engage in Canada’s civic and political life are the impetus for the six research papers in the series and this synthesis report. First and foremost, we hope that this work will broaden our collective understanding about how to build more inclusive democratic practices and spaces that engage the energy, passion and commitment of Canada’s younger citizens. We hope that it will pique the interest of researchers, educators, parents, policy-makers, parties and politicians, and encourage them to look at young people in a different light – as fellow citizens and partners with a stake in their society and the desire and capacity to contribute to its formation and future. We also hope that it speaks strongly to young people and motivates them to become engaged or deepen their civic and political participation.

## Exploring Different Facets of Youth Participation

CPRN commissioned six papers that probe different facets of youth civic and political participation and explore different subpopulations. They are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Research Papers**

<p><b><i>Indifferent or Just Different? The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada</i></b></p> <p>Brenda O’Neill</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a comprehensive overview of the literature about youth political and civic engagement in Canada and elsewhere</li> <li>• Discusses the state of existing knowledge and research gaps, limitations and challenges; identifies research priorities to deepen knowledge</li> <li>• Recommends policy directions for increasing youth engagement</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>A Group Apart: Young Party Members in Canada</i></b></p> <p>Lisa Young and William Cross</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mines authors’ survey data of young political party members (Liberal, NDP and Bloc<sup>5</sup>) and other politically engaged youth on university campuses</li> <li>• Analyzes the differences between the two groups and forwards policy and political party reforms to attract young people to formal political institutions</li> <li>• Offers concrete suggestions to parties about how to have greater appeal to youth</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>The Meaning of Political Participation for Indigenous Youth</i></b></p> <p>Taiaiake Alfred, Jackie Price and Brock Pitawanakwat</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-authored by two Indigenous graduate students in collaboration with T. Alfred</li> <li>• Employs a combination of personal interviews and focus group methodologies to probe what political engagement means to Indigenous youth</li> <li>• Discusses the implications of their attitudes and beliefs about political participation in Canadian electoral processes and institutions<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the merger of the Progressive Conservative and Canadian Alliance parties at the time of the initial mail survey made their inclusion in this research impossible. The authors note that “there is some reason to believe that the calculus for joining a party might be somewhat different on the right” (Young and Cross, 2007:7).

<sup>6</sup> While the results cannot be generalized to the broader Indigenous population, this paper offers new insights and poses provocative strategies in relation to Indigenous youth’s political participation.

<p><b><i>Rendre compte et soutenir l'action bénévole des jeunes</i></b></p> <p>André Thibault, Patrice Albertus and Julie Fortier</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-authored by a team of academics and graduate students; focuses on Quebec youth's civic participation</li> <li>• Builds on previous qualitative survey data, adding findings from focus groups (using inductive research methods), to deepen our understanding of youth motivations to engage civically</li> <li>• Identifies actions to address the barriers to greater youth participation in Quebec</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>The State and Potential of Civic Learning in Canada</i></b></p> <p>Kristina Llewellyn, Sharon Cook, Joel Westheimer, Luz Alison Molina Girón and Karen Suurtamm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written by a team of researchers (led by a younger academic working with senior academics and PhD students); explores what kind of knowledge and skills serves as a basis for civic learning of young Canadians and what changes are needed to encourage greater participation</li> <li>• Combines a literature review, qualitative interviews and questionnaires to analyze the current trends in citizenship education in Canada</li> <li>• Recommends the creation of a civic literacy strategy for schools that teaches students to make informed, active public policy choices and engage with their communities for social change</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>“What Do You Mean I Can’t Have a Say?” Young Canadians and Their Government</i></b></p> <p>André Turcotte</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on analysis of two public opinion surveys probing youth attitudes toward government and politics</li> <li>• Examines some generational reasons for the decline in electoral participation by young people in Canada</li> <li>• Concludes that youth hold a different set of priorities and a different view of the role of government than previous generations and comments on the implications for governments and political institutions</li> </ul>

Overall, the papers combine complementary quantitative and qualitative research methods, including literature reviews, opinion polls, surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews and both inductive and deductive approaches. Employing a plurality of methods helps to present a more accurate portrait and provides a deeper understanding of youth participation in civic and political life in Canada. It also adds strength and validity to the results. One-size-fits-all policy doesn't match the heterogeneity and complexity of youth needs. So, too, reliance on a single research method does not suffice to get at the heart of the issue of how and why (and why not) youth participate in our collective life.

## **A Note about How Youth Were Involved in the Research and Synthesis Series**

The Project Advisory Group was created to guide the research process and review the draft papers. This group included solid representation from youth and youth-serving organizations (see list of members in Appendix 1).<sup>7</sup> Some members also observed the CPRN workshop (March 2007) that engaged a diverse group of young people from Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Nunavut, as well as the authors to help inform their research (see Appendix 2 for a list of participants). Several authors are young scholars and graduate students, and most of the papers also engaged youth directly in the research undertaken. In May 2007, a CPRN-hosted Research Roundtable with the authors, the Project Advisory Group members, workshop participants, youth organizations, academics, policy-makers and politicians discussed the six draft papers. Feedback from this roundtable further informed the authors' revisions and CPRN's thinking about youth engagement (see Appendix 3 for the list of participants). Finally, the synthesis report preparation also benefited from the insights and perspectives of a young political science graduate.

### **Structure of Report**

This report synthesizes key learnings from the six research papers and incorporates CPRN's youth dialogue and research findings and other recent research on youth participation. Section 1 sets out the objectives for the research series and situates the six research papers within that context. The second section provides a brief overview of youth civic and political participation and then synthesizes the research findings, organized around a typology of sociological, psychological and institutional factors. Section 3 recommends policy directions and actions to youth and their families, politicians and political parties, public officials, educators and the voluntary sector with the hope of broadening and deepening the civic spirit, ethos and participation of young Canadians. Section 4 identifies priority areas for a research agenda, focusing on gaps, contested evidence and methodological questions emerging from the papers. The concluding section comments on the need for greater intergenerational dialogue to move past misunderstanding to strengthen Canada's political and civic life.

---

<sup>7</sup> CPRN has engaged an array of youth-oriented organizations in the National Dialogue and Summit on Engaging Young Canadians and in this research series, including TakingITGlobal, D-Code, the Centre for Excellence on Youth Engagement, Canada25, Student Vote, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia Youth Advisory Councils, Apathy is Boring, Student Commission, St. Paul University Youth Facilitation Program, and Afghanistan Peace Ambassadors.

## 2. What We Learned

### Overview of Youth Civic and Political Participation in Canada

The profile of youth participation is complex, sometimes contradictory or contested, and remains incomplete. Nonetheless, we can be confident of a few things. We know that today's youth have less formal political knowledge than previous generations and at the same time are highly suspicious of political spin and insincerity. Despite being the best-educated cohort in our history, many of them don't grasp how government and political institutions work nor do they get the connections between their everyday realities, politics and policy. And, as is well publicized – 40% of the non-voting in federal elections is attributed to lower turnout among the young (Pammett and LeDuc, 2003).

All six papers in this series and many researchers argue that members of Generation Y (those born after 1979) share attitudes and behaviour that point to distinct generational attributes or effects. The effects relate to the distinct events and socio-economic, cultural and political circumstances shaping one's formative years (O'Neill, 2007: 2). These generational effects are elaborated below. Generation Y is also shaped by life cycle effects (that is, the idea that different stages of life – childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, parenthood and senior years – influence and condition one's political attitudes and outlooks).

Although less politically literate than previous generations, Generation Y members are knowledgeable and sophisticated in other ways and are quick to apply new online tools to mobilize socially and sometimes politically. Interestingly, they sometimes do not identify their activities as being political even when they are. They are impatient with traditional ways of engaging politically – they are turned off by political parties and partisan politics and dislike hierarchical approaches to organization and mobilization. This generation is much more wired, getting more of their news and information online and from alternative, rather than mainstream, media.

These young people are more likely than older Canadians to participate in political demonstrations, to volunteer and to be a member of a group or organization. They volunteer for different activities (predominantly coaching, refereeing/officiating and fundraising) and are motivated for different reasons (O'Neill, 2007: 13). They look for engagement that has personal meaning and delivers faster results than traditional routes. They use the marketplace to practice “consumer citizenship” (Pattie, Syed and Whiteley, 2004, in O'Neill, 2007) and turn to boycotts and boycotts as forms of political expression (Hooghe and Stolle, 2004; O'Neill, 2007). When they are given venues for meaningful participation, they have a lot to contribute and exhibit deep concern about their communities and country.

Knowledge and understanding of youth engagement in Canada is substantial and growing, but important gaps remain. While we know that young Canadians are at least as, if not more, pluralistic and diverse as older citizens, there is a lack of adequate research on their participation attitudes and motivations, as well as the patterns of subpopulations, including unengaged youth, those who have lower socio-economic status, those without post-secondary education, ethno-cultural youth in all their diversity, young women and Indigenous youth. Generalizations that

reflect the realities of the more engaged group of youth are not very helpful when trying to define and elaborate strategies and policy interventions targeted at those less likely to engage. Rather, context-sensitive, tailored strategies are required to best meet the diversity of needs to be addressed.

The question of what constitutes politics and things political and how to define political identity – using the vantage point of young people – is an important element explored in this research series. The papers expose an important quandary regarding traditional definitions and concepts used to study and analyze youth behaviour and attitudes related to politics, democracy and participation. In general, the literature and surveys take a traditional approach to defining political interest, knowledge and participation. Political participation is generally defined to involve the “formal arena of politics: political parties, elections, interest groups, social movements and protest behaviour. Civic participation, on the other hand, extends to include participation in community activities, normally those designed to bring about some social good (often in the form of a policy change or program implementation) as well as social organizations” (O’Neill, 2007: 2). In an era when “politics” carries such pejorative connotations, it is not unreasonable to question whether standardized surveys on political participation, using traditional language and concepts, fail to adequately capture what is going on below the surface. Are concepts about political participation and politics being poorly translated for youth audiences on the one hand and misinterpreted by youth on the other hand? There is an emerging discourse among young people, including discussion that occurs through online networking that calls out for study and analysis. This report will argue that we need to broaden definitions and understandings of how young people comprehend political and civic interest and activity. It also explores how their world views, sense of personal (and political) identity and sense of belonging condition, influence and affect their participation.

The next section synthesizes key findings emerging from the six research papers and clusters them into three broad categories: sociological, psychological and institutional factors. Collectively they tell us a lot about what shapes, conditions, influences and impacts youth civic and political participation.

## **Sociological Factors**

### ***Socio-Economic Status: Not an Equal Playing Field***

The research reveals, not surprisingly, that acquisition of post-secondary education is strongly correlated with higher levels of youth civic and political participation (Gidengil et al., 2005). In the same vein, voter decline is concentrated among youth (those born after 1970) who have not completed a secondary or post-secondary education (Gidengil et al., 2003; Gidengil et al., 2005: 7; see also Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, Turcotte, 2007, Keown, 2007).

In addition, those who are found in lower-income groups (Gidengil et al., 2004b), including Indigenous youth (Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007: 14), new Canadians, some ethno-cultural youth and those with disabilities, are also less likely to vote or be engaged civically or politically. In sum, “combined, education and income help to explain much of the variation in engagement among young Canadians” (O’Neill, 2007: 22).

Some counterintuitive results are also found (i.e. those with higher education are also voting less). For example, the rising education levels of today's youth co-exist with lower levels of political knowledge, less voting, a diminished sense of civic duty to vote and less interest in formal politics. Generational effects help to explain this seeming paradox. This suggests that higher education alone is not enough to guarantee robust participation. Other important factors likely to increase the likelihood of participation include cultivating an interest in politics; nurturing a sense of political efficacy; providing opportunities for self-actualizing, meaningful, non-hierarchical involvement; and adapting language and media to appeal to youth sensibilities.

### ***Early Socialization: Childhood Matters***

Five (Llewellyn et al., 2007; Young and Cross, 2007; O'Neill, 2007; Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007; Turcotte, 2007) of the six papers in this series discuss ways in which the family context can influence youth perceptions and attitudes about politics and participation. We know that the family plays an important role in the transmission of knowledge and values and that this may be key to understanding the changing nature of youth engagement. The Young and Cross comparison of on-campus young party members and non-party activists reveals that, while both groups had higher levels of political socialization at an early age than their non-engaged peers, young party members have experienced even more of it. Young and Cross (2007: 2) note the following:

“their upbringings have primed them to join parties, as their parents are likely to have belonged to political parties, to have initiated regular discussions of politics in the family home and to have inculcated habits of news consumption in their children. In essence, we can think of these socializing factors as having exerted a pull toward partisan activity that outweighed the broader societal push away from partisanship.”

The fact that families are spending less time together has been identified as a potential cause for declining youth political interest and engagement (O'Neill, 2007; Turcotte, 2007). For instance, Turcotte cites results from the 2004 Canada Election Study (CES) showing that only 18% of young people (18 to 30 years) reported “talking about politics on a daily basis as a kid,” compared with 24.2% for those in the 31 to 40 age group and over 30% for those aged 41 and older (Turcotte, 2007: 31).

### ***Gender***

While in-depth gender-based analysis was not possible in this series, a few points do speak to some important differences between young women and men. Young and Cross (2007) found that gender did not affect respondents' evaluations of political parties but did influence evaluations of interest groups. They note that “young women are more inclined than men toward social movement or advocacy-type activities, a pattern that is reflected in the gender breakdown of non-party members in this study” (Young and Cross, 2007: 8; see also Hooghe et al., 2004). Vromen (2003: 96) draws a similar conclusion from her study of Australian youth: young women tend to be more attracted to communitarian and activist activities rather than more traditional and formal political participation. Likewise, O'Neill emphasizes that socialization differences, skills, time and resources, and male-dominated political institutions all play a role in explaining the differences

between male and female patterns and forms of participation (O'Neill, 2007). As this respondent put it, if youth are marginalized from politics, it is even more difficult for young Indigenous women to relate to formal politics, whether First Nation band councils or Canadian politicians:

It has become more reactionary now because of our own political leadership – it's not just about reacting to Canadian leadership or white leadership but also to Indigenous leadership. I think some of our politics have become complacent so I think youth now have the hard task of not only fighting with the white system but also fighting with our own people, with our own leadership ... Now, it's about breaking down Aboriginal power as well as white power (Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007: 8).

### ***Life Cycle and Generational Effects (Boomers and Bloggers)***

On balance, while both life cycle (stage of life) and generational effects are at play, the weight of the research tips toward generational effects having a more decisive role in explaining at least part of the current pattern of youth civic and political participation (Gidengil et al., 2005; Howe, 2003; Milner, 2002; O'Neill, 2007). The six papers largely share this view. Young and Cross (2007: 26) summarize this view well in concluding that their findings suggest “processes of structurally grounded generational change.”

Generation Y came to age at a particular time, when:

- politics and things political (including the role of government) became devalued (Delli Carpini, 2000);
- trust in public and private institutions was eroding;
- the age of deference was in decline (Nevitte, 1996);
- post-materialism and greater cognitive mobilization were on the rise (Inglehart, 1997; Nevitte, 1996);
- hierarchical forms of political participation were increasingly being rejected (Inglehart, 1997; Nevitte, 1996);
- the pervasive influences of information and communication technologies (ICT) contributed to a speeded-up and action-oriented culture (Turcotte, 2007); and
- greater individual choice was trumpeted as a social good, and the government adopted private sector “client” orientations in its relations with the public.

In addition, research on the phenomenon of delayed maturity raises questions about the political, social and economic consequences of today's youth remaining at home longer than previous generations. Between 1981 and 2001, the proportion of adult children aged 25 to 29 still living at home doubled, from 12% to 24% (CRIC, 2003). The most recent Census (2006) found that 43.5% of young adults (20 to 29 years of age) have either remained at home with their families or have moved back in (up from 41.1% in 2001) (Statistics Canada, 2007). This has significant implications for a range of policy issues (e.g. family formation, volunteering, donations and employment trajectories).

The qualitative study of Indigenous youth by Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat also reveals generational attitudinal differences that suggest something other than life cycle effects. Those interviewed talked of being alienated from their own reserve politicians and wanting to do politics differently. One noted the following: “We don’t want to waste time. We see our parents’ generation just sit around and wait and wait and wait. So we are at the point now where a lot of the ‘issues’ that we are facing are ones we can see directly in our own lives, like violence” (Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007: 9). Another participant stated: “Our leadership has become so involved in negotiating and compromising that now youth want to undo some of that to create a new kind of Indigenous politics again” (Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007: 8).

What emerges from the papers in this series is clear: this generation does not relate well to the ways in which many researchers and policy-makers have traditionally defined politics, participation, volunteerism and citizenship. Several of the authors, supported by other research, argue that many of today’s youth interpret these concepts in ways that don’t connect with definitions and concepts found in mainstream political and social science. For example, it seems that, for many youth, the term “politics” has become a synonym for self-serving, narrow, partisan politics and, as such, is of little interest to them (O’Neill, 2007; Turcotte, 2007; Young and Cross, 2007).

Furthermore, youth are less likely to discuss politics in the home than older generations (O’Neill, 2007), and some teachers are uncomfortable or ill-equipped to deal with classroom discussions involving political and public issues (Llewellyn et al., 2007). It seems that youth, for a variety of reasons, are not developing a good understanding of traditional political governance and the concept and practice of democracy. Having a more solid grounding of this would help them form, articulate and defend their own ideas and questions about traditional and non-traditional politics.

It appears that some surveys are not capturing an accurate picture of political engagement. In addition to inadequate capturing of youth attitudes about political and public issues, there is some evidence that the ways in which “participation” gets defined in surveys leads to an under-reporting of youth engagement. As Llewellyn and associates note, “it is possible that the ways we have come to describe youth have further isolated them from perceived ‘adult’ politics. It is also possible that many of the ways traditionally used to describe political engagement have become either calcified and/or obsolete in describing contemporary youth attitudes, skills and knowledge for democratic engagement” (Llewellyn et al., 2007: 17). Similarly, Thibault, Albertus and Fortier (2007) find that even those youth who are active in traditional politics do not view their actions as being political. O’Neill (2007) states that, if youth have different interpretations or perceptions of certain concepts, we need a different kind of discourse that can better capture how they are participating and understand and adapt to their reality. This comment has important implications for civic education programs, for recruitment strategies for political parties and for a civil society interested in getting more youth on board.

## ***Knowledge, Skills and Participation***

As noted, there is general consensus in the literature, reinforced in this research series, that today's youth demonstrate low levels of formal political knowledge, including knowledge of political parties and their policy platforms (Gidengil et al., 2003; CPRN, 2006; Gidengil et al., 2005; Llewellyn et al., 2007; MacKinnon and Watling, 2006; O'Neill, 2007; Young and Cross, 2007). Research clearly shows a correlation between political knowledge and political participation, but it is not possible to assert any direct causal relationships. Llewellyn and colleagues (2007: 19) highlight the fact that "researchers continue to debate the cause and effect relationships among knowledge, interest and participation," concluding that this is an important though contested area of research that deserves greater attention.

As O'Neill (2007: 25) states in reference to Saunders' (forthcoming) work "the generational shift in media use, from traditional to online media, needs to be better understood for its role in shaping the civic skills, orientations and activities of young citizens." O'Neill (2007) and Turcotte (2007) reference surveys indicating that youth pay less attention to traditional news than other age groups, noting that this contributes to lower political participation. It is clear that this young generation turns to the Internet as a source of news to a much greater extent than older people. O'Neill notes that 42% of youth aged 19 to 24 identify the Internet as a source of news – this percentage drops steadily across older age categories (O'Neill, 2007: 15). However, Turcotte finds that, for those who access news on a daily basis, 18- to 30-year-old people are just as likely as 31- to 40-year-old people to use the Internet as a source for news (Turcotte, 2007: 20).

Results from CPRN's dialogues and youth workshops lend credence to the argument that many young people feel that they lack the knowledge and skills to engage in the formal political arena. In fact, participants in the March 2007 Youth Workshop felt burdened (and sometimes overwhelmed) by their perceptions of elders' expectations that they must fix the mistakes of previous generations (CPRN, 2007). Several referred to climate changes as an example. As one participant described it, "we're told to fix things but the tools we get are a few nails and no hammer" (CPRN, 2007: 2). Llewellyn and colleagues emphasize that there has been little attention given to the question about what skills are required to make political knowledge useful. Their findings from focus groups, interviews and questionnaires lead them to conclude that "youth do not possess skills for political action." In fact, these authors argue that most of the skills taught "are situated as hypothetical or without application beyond the school walls" (Llewellyn et al., 2007: 25).

## **Psychological Factors**

### ***Identity Matters***

The youth participants at CPRN's March 2007 Workshop also gave a strong message about the importance of developing a sense of personal identity as a necessary part of forming one's political identity and aspirations. In their words, "you need to know who you are before you can engage." At the same time, they recognized that their identity was shaped, in part, by their connections with others (CPRN, 2007: 2).

The papers by Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat (2007) and by Llewellyn et al. (2007) elaborate on this theme, noting that the question of identity is a central and contentious issue in their studies. The focus groups and individual interviews with Indigenous youth (most of whom are pursuing post-secondary education) reveal varying degrees of ambiguity about their Canadian identity and, in some cases, outright rejection. While it is not possible to generalize from this small sample of Indigenous youth pursuing post-secondary education, the findings raise important questions that should be pursued with a larger study. This question of identity directly influences and colours these young people's sense of themselves as Canadian citizens, with all that this entails. Their specific Indigenous identity is central, and their ideas and actions about political participation flow from this. The interviews reveal a wide range of perspectives about political participation: from pragmatism (e.g. citizenship and voting as a preventive strategy), to ambiguity and uncertainty about the efficacy of political participation, to alienation from Canadian political institutions, which are associated with a troubled history of colonization. Most of the Indigenous youth interviewed seemed to find local Indigenous politics (land claim issues and band councils) more relevant to their lives than provincial, territorial or federal politics (Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007).

Just as Indigenous youth may have multiple identities that are sometimes in tension, so too do young newcomers and second generations. This can also be true of youth with strong religious identities that may conflict with the secularized identities of most Canadian youth. More research on this issue of conflicting identities is needed (see Section 4 for further elaboration).

Young and Cross (2007) found that young party members were more traditional and more deferential to authority than young activists. Reinforcing this traditional profile of party members, their survey found that religious affiliation correlated positively with partisan activity but not with other forms of political engagement. "Secularization, the rejection of hierarchical forms and declining confidence in political parties appear ... to be related phenomena" (Young and Cross, 2007: 24). Interestingly, according to Thibault, Albertus and Fortier (2007: 9), youth in Quebec are more likely than other young Canadians to engage in political rather than civic activities. They argue that it is in part because the young Québécois reject volunteerism since it has been traditionally associated with the church, which is associated negatively with the hierarchical society of the past.

With reference to Putman (2000) and Delli Carpini (2000), O'Neill notes that growing individualism, social isolation and a decline in social capital contribute to changes in the nature of engagement among young people: it has become a "one-on-one experience" and therefore is "missing the connection between the individual, isolated 'problems' ... and the world of public policy" (O'Neill, 2007:20).

The impact of and relationship between technology and political and personal identity is identified by O'Neill (2007). She observes that youth at CPRN's March 2007 Workshop identified their Internet peers as a "sub-peer group" and wonders how these different networks are impacting identity and participation (see CPRN, 2007). Citing Saunders, she notes the use of the Internet "not just as a tool for political information but also as a *space* for political interaction and organization" (Saunders, forthcoming: 25, italics in original, as cited in O'Neill, 2007: 25).

A young Canadian's successful Facebook campaign to support the monks' protest in Burma is one such recent example of how one youth acting alone engaged in political mobilization through technology.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is important to recognize the tension that exists between online interaction, which tends to be individualistic, and the collective learning, engagement, negotiation and compromise required in public policy-making. However, technology is not intrinsically individualistic: it is also used to build solidarity by providing online tools used by off-line communities to facilitate communication and collective mobilization.<sup>9</sup>

## ***Interest***

The question of political interest is easy to answer at first blush: survey data consistently indicate that the younger adult generation has little interest in political issues. However, the answer is not really so straightforward because of uncertainty around the ways in which traditional surveys pose the questions (Thibault, Albertus and Fortier, 2007; Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007; Llewellyn et al., 2007; O'Neill, 2007; Saunders, forthcoming; see also Vromen, 2003). Are we missing the mark because the surveys are missing or misunderstanding youth discourse on politics? The ways in which "politics" is defined – partisan political activities, formal political events, policy issues and political news – may not be connecting with a broader and more personal understanding that young people have of politics and of those public issues that they care deeply about.

CPRN's dialogues and workshops with young people certainly demonstrate a high degree of interest in discussing public issues when these are framed to connect with youth's realities, presented in an accessible format and venue, and when youth's contributions are taken seriously. Section 4 further elaborates on this point.

The research series reinforces other findings that engaged youth are more likely to be informed about political issues (Thibault, Albertus and Fortier, 2007; Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007; Llewellyn et al., 2007; O'Neill, 2007; Young and Cross, 2007). According to Young and Cross (2007), young party members are somewhat more politically literate than advocacy group members and are more likely to use traditional media as information sources. However, it bears emphasizing that, while having a basic understanding of civic and political institutions is important, requiring students to memorize and regurgitate more facts about sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution, past prime ministers and historical dates is unlikely to translate into greater excitement about politics and participation. The CPRN March 2007 Youth Workshop participants reinforced this point.

The relationship between political interest, knowledge and participation is complex and is not illuminated by representing it as a simple linear progression. As Llewellyn and colleagues point out, "while we identify a positive correlation between political knowledge and political

---

<sup>8</sup> Nineteen-year-old Alex Bookbinder, travelling in Burma as the protests unfurled, had to return to Canada due to the unrest. His modest Facebook campaign rallied more than 160,000 people to the cause. For more information, see [www.thestar.com/article/261973](http://www.thestar.com/article/261973) (Burgmann and Cherry, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> The authors wish to acknowledge Ilona Dougherty, Executive Director of Apathy is Boring, for this point. See [www.apathyisboring.com](http://www.apathyisboring.com).

participation, there is little evidence that increased political knowledge is *the cause* of increased political engagement. What seems to connect both political knowledge and participation is political interest” (Llewellyn et al., 2007: 22). Ideas about how to spark and sustain that interest are explored in Section 3.

- ***Civic Duty (Thou Shall Vote)***

Research has linked a declining sense of civic duty with declining voter turnout among Generation Y members. Referring to Pammett and LeDuc (2004), Turcotte states that “civic duty has been defined as the feeling that participation is to be valued for its own sake, or for its contribution to the overall health of the polity and does not need to be justified on self-interested or utilitarian grounds” (Turcotte, 2007: 13). Turcotte refers to the 2004 CES, which reports that only 56.4% of young voters strongly agree that every citizen has a duty to vote in federal elections compared with 81.9% of those over 40. And less than 30% of younger Canadians (18 to 30) strongly agree that “someone who does not vote does not have the right to criticize the government” (Turcotte, 2007: 14-15).

### ***Efficacy (Internal and External)***

Internal efficacy is understood as a feeling that one can effect change and has the capacity to understand and influence political decision-making, while external efficacy manifests as the feeling that governments and political institutions are responsive to citizens and are effective change agents (O’Neill, 2007).

Youth tend to demonstrate lower levels of internal and external efficacy than older generations (Llewellyn et al., 2007; O’Neill, 2007; Turcotte, 2007; Young and Cross, 2007). O’Neill (2007) highlights evidence from the 2004 CES that shows that 62.4% of young Canadians (18 to 25 years) feel that government and politics “seem so complicated that a person like me can’t understand what is going on” (see also Archer and Wesley, 2006). According to Turcotte, youth are most likely to think that they have no influence on what government does and to believe that the government does not care about what they think. Young voters are also less likely than those over the age of 40 to feel that they have a good understanding of important policy issues (Turcotte, 2007: 9). Llewellyn and colleagues observe that few of the students they interviewed “could envision how greater youth voice or representation of youth issues in government could make a difference” (Llewellyn et al., 2007: 15).

In the Young and Cross (2007) study, only 28% of young political party members believed that joining a party was a very effective way of achieving social change (the highest rated choice of the tactics suggested). They also held joining an advocacy type group in high regard as a vehicle for change. In contrast, a mere 10% of the young activists rated parties as an effective vehicle (the lowest rated of all tactics). Activists felt that attending a lawful demonstration was the most effective means for effective change (30%) (Young and Cross, 2007).

One aspect of efficacy that deserves closer study is the question about how older generations’ perception of youth affects (positively and negatively) youth confidence and engagement.

## **Institutional Factors**

### ***Governments and Representative Democracy***

The research reveals that knowledge regarding the theory and mechanics of government and democratic institutions is generally low (CPRN, 2006; Llewellyn et al., 2007; O’Neil, 2007; Turcotte, 2007). The youth participants in CPRN-hosted activities support this finding. Young people feel that government has little to do with them – they don’t tend to connect the role of government with the issues they think are important, perhaps due to their limited understanding of government and how it works. Counterintuitively, cynicism toward government and the political system is generally lower among young Canadians than among older ones, and, interestingly, they have greater confidence in party leaders and candidates than older generations (O’Neill, 2007: 17).

The Young and Cross study found that young activists and young party members shared a similar general orientation toward the political system and institutions (with party members having only slightly more confidence in each institution, except the police). Apolitical, non-partisan organizations of the state received the highest confidence of young people, with the Supreme Court, public schools, the police and the civil service being the top four, followed by unions, the federal government and provincial governments. Political parties, the media, organized religion and big business received the least confidence. Young and Cross argue that “this speaks to a skepticism not of government, but of politics and politicians that is perhaps characteristic of this generation” (Young and Cross, 2007: 17). The 2004 CES data revealed somewhat different results, including respect for the civil service and federal government that ranked lower than respect for organized religion. There was no category for political parties (Turcotte, 2007).

Young people’s experience with technology may be contributing to an expectation of immediacy in response and results, and this may be influencing their views of governments. Llewellyn and associates propose the idea that, “given the ease with which youth can discuss and organize around political issues on the Internet, they may find the slow, bureaucratic nature of parliamentary politics alienating” (Llewellyn et al., 2007: 18). Similarly Turcotte writes that young people today have more control over their daily lives than any previous generation. He also criticizes the “stodginess of the democratic political system and their unwillingness to adapt to the reality of the empowered young citizen” (Turcotte, 2007: 2).

### ***Political Parties***

The evidence is irrefutable: young Canadians are much less likely to join political parties than previous generations, increasing the danger that participatory membership-based political parties will become less and less viable in Canada (O’Neill, 2001, 2007; Young and Cross, 2007). This trend is also evident in other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (see Mair and Biezan, 2001). In 2000, only one in 20 Canadians between 18 and 30 had ever belonged to a political party, compared with one-third of those over 60 (Young and Cross, 2007). The Young and Cross survey of young university party members and non-party activists presents interesting explanations about why youth are not engaging with political parties.

It is significant and striking that both party members and campus activists believe that ordinary party members, youth party members and riding associations do not wield as much influence as they should and that the party leaders and pollsters are too powerful (Young and Cross, 2007). When asked to give a general rating of political parties and interest groups (on a 100-point scale), activists rated interest groups at a mean score of 62 and parties at 48. Party members rated interest groups at 58 and parties at 59. Interestingly, the majority of party members gave interest groups a score equal to, or higher than, the score they gave to parties (Young and Cross, 2007).

Non-party members are skeptical of parties as institutions and see them as:

- hierarchical organizations that do not welcome young people;
- not willing to give members an adequate role in directing the organization;
- leader-driven with expectations that membership will be subservient; and
- not being a strategic route to effect social change (Young and Cross, 2007: 25-26).

Young activists prefer bottom-up organizations where the leader is equal to or subservient to the membership and where they can engage in a meaningful and fulsome way. As Young and Cross state, “there is a culture clash between these egalitarian members of Generation Y and the top-down organization of Canadian political parties” (Young and Cross, 2007: iii). They note that parties must adapt to this generational change, as there is little likelihood of reversing the attitudes that underlie young people’s perceptions of parties. Young and Cross extrapolate from their survey to the broader population: “Triangulating against surveys of the Canadian public suggests that the perceptions of non-party members are fairly typical of their generation” (Young and Cross, 2007: 26).

Supporting the Young and Cross conclusion that political parties are out of step with youth, Turcotte (2007: 12) asserts that “young voters feel that their priorities are largely ignored, and if they choose to behave rationally (at least as understood by rational choice theorists) little incentive exists for young people to vote.” He goes on to say that “Some even suggest, echoing Galbraith’s concerns, that youth turnout has declined in part as a result of motivation on the part of political strategists to engage youth, or even include youth in the discourse.” The research shows that, of the young party members who were asked to join, only 15% were asked to join by a politician or party officer, as compared with over 40% of older members. In their view, this suggests that parties are not effectively reaching out to young people (Young and Cross, 2007).

### ***Educational Institutions (Civics/Citizenship Education)***

The research is almost unanimous in recognizing schools as the public institution best suited to reach the majority of young citizens (Llewellyn et al., 2007). The literature also identifies schools and, more precisely, civics or citizenship education – both in content and pedagogy – as being both a significant cause of and a solution for declining political knowledge and skills. In the Young and Cross study (2007), exposure to politics via formal education (high school Civics and university Political Science courses) was the only socialization variable to have a robust effect. The authors also note that attitudes toward parties improve with formal political education.

Their investigation on the state of civic learning in Canada (Llewellyn et al., 2007) reveals that only Ontario has a compulsory Civics course (a half-credit program in Grade 10) which is, according to the young Ontarian participants at the March 2007 Workshop, too little too late (CPRN, 2007). Most provinces require graduating students to have successfully completed at least one Social Studies or History course that offers some content on government and civics. The Llewellyn et al. study describes provincial curricula as being primarily characterized by procedural knowledge and compliant codes of behaviour, which do not encourage collective action or systemic understandings of political issues. Focus group interviews with Ottawa area high school students reinforce this conclusion: “For most students sharing opinions and listening to others were important personal and relational skills. They did not see, however, how these seemingly individualized attributes could translate into systemic analysis and action” (Llewellyn et al., 2007: 26).

Civics is not taught in a vacuum – it is influenced and contextualized by the model of citizen that the educational authority is implicitly or explicitly advancing. The Westheimer and Kahne (2004) typology includes three archetypes: the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen and the social justice-oriented citizen.<sup>10</sup> Provincial curricula emphasize particular kinds of historical knowledge and also share three aims and procedures: (1) civic knowledge characterized as having procedural and legislative content; (2) a focus on fundamental Canadian civic virtues; and (3) an emphasis on comparable pedagogic approaches to develop and deepen student knowledge and commitment to democratic processes. However, curricula only occasionally suggest any discussion of controversial issues (Llewellyn et al., 2007: 29). Unfortunately, many schools seem to lack the resources to support more experiential and active civic learning activities. And, as argued by O’Neill (2007: 28), “lower levels of political knowledge and a weaker understanding of the requirements of citizenship and civic duty have been implicitly associated with changes in curriculum.”

Informed by their literature review, their analysis of curricula and guidelines for civic learning programs, and focus groups with Ottawa students and teachers, Llewellyn and colleagues (2007: 31-32) conclude that “schools typically avoid political controversies despite considerable evidence that teaching political conflict increases engagement. This kind of value-neutrality obsessively nurtured by institutions may have wrought damage to the institutional capacity to influence youth in meaningful ways.” There is evidence that teachers feel ill-equipped to help students understand and work through divergent and contested views on important public issues, and yet this goes to the heart of the democratic decision-making required of citizens.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Llewellyn et al. (2007: 5) for further detail on citizenship education models, including discussion of Parker’s (2006, 98:104-125) three different conceptions of citizen education for a democratic society: traditional, progressive and advanced.

## **Civil Society**

It is important to differentiate between traditional political activity and non-traditional, unconventional political activity. While the first refers to vehicles such as formal interest groups (with a purpose of bringing about some kind of political change on an issue through non-political party and direct election means), the second relates to activities such as political protest and demonstrations, signing petitions and participating in political boycotts and boycotts (O'Neill, 2007). Civic participation is a broader category that includes volunteering, participating in peer and community events (social, cultural, recreational, sport), and self-organized social/community activity that has a self-help dimension (Thibault, Albertus and Fortier, 2007; O'Neill, 2007). The study on Quebec youth (Thibault, Albertus and Fortier, 2007) categorizes youth civic participation by three dimensions: service (more traditional orientation), social and public.

Youth display higher levels of engagement with non-traditional political activities and are more likely than older adults to participate in political demonstrations, to volunteer and to be a member of a group or organization. Their volunteering patterns, as well as motivations, differ from older generations. According to Thibault, Albertus and Fortier (2007), Quebec youth see “engaged giving” or “active citizenship” as both an individual and a social investment. They define themselves as involved, engaged and citizens, but reject the term “volunteer.” These authors (Thibault, Albertus and Fortier, 2007: 6) comment that youth view volunteerism as a type of giving of one’s “heart and soul” associated with the religious beliefs and obligations of previous generations. O’Neill reinforces this point, noting that youth cite improving job opportunities, exploring their strengths and wanting to be with their friends as reasons for engaging (O’Neill, 2007). The word “volunteering” seems to have negative connotations for some youth, who see it as intimidating and requiring a major commitment (Thibault, Albertus and Fortier, 2007; Llewellyn et al., 2007).

A striking finding from the Thibault et al. (2007) study is the seeming misalignment between what young people are looking for in a voluntary/civic experience and what the leaders of civic organizations think youth are interested in. This study of Quebec youth reveals a different ethic from the traditional service-oriented volunteering model. Based on these study results, youth are looking for a reciprocal relationship whereby their giving is matched by receiving or by a benefit (*le contre-don*). “C’est cette relation d’échanges entre les jeunes et leurs organismes receveurs qui compose ici l’identité et la forme du don” (Thibault, Albertus and Fortier, 2007: iii). Parallel research studies in other parts of Canada are needed to determine whether this attitude is shared across the country; however, some evidence of similarity exists. For instance, a study led by D-Code found that most younger people volunteered to support a cause they believed in, but most also displayed a pragmatic attitude to volunteering, using it to learn new job-related skills and to enhance employment opportunities (Barnard, Campbell and Smith, 2003: 3).

Llewellyn and associates suggest that new technologies have “inculcated more ‘participatory instincts’ among youth, who now expect a high level of participation and control in their interactions with the world.” This pushes them away from formal politics toward grassroots action (Llewellyn et al. 2007: 18). Young people involved in CPRN’s work have voiced their preference for the immediacy of results that come from grassroots participation (CPRN, 2007).

## Summary

The dearth and decline of formal political participation among youth, including voting, is complex and cannot be explained by any single factor or theory (Turcotte, 2007). The evidence points to an interconnected and overlapping set of factors, including generational effects, socio-economic differences, changes in socialization patterns, a disenchantment with political practices and institutions, the failure of political institutions to reach out to youth and attend to their needs and motivations, the pervasive effects of ICT in all facets of daily life, identity confusion and low levels of internal and external political efficacy. The low civic literacy of youth is also very germane. Research reveals that teachers lack the institutional supports, pedagogic tool kits, resources and political support to give students a solid grounding in civic education.

While we know quite a lot about youth participation, important research gaps and challenges remain. Nonetheless, there is enough knowledge to start implementing the changes needed. Section 3 focuses on what can be done now to better prepare youth for active citizenship. Section 4 then discusses key research priorities to advance knowledge and to inform policy interventions and actions.

### **3. Making Space for Youth at the Citizenship Table: Policy Directions and Levers**

Section 4 will explore research questions that merit deeper exploration, but this does not mean that action must wait. Much can be done now. Guided by a societal goal of preparing all youth to become full and active citizens – civically and politically – this section plots a course of action that will facilitate youth in finding and articulating their voice, securing a sense of belonging, establishing their identity and learning citizenship through “participation” in society. At the same time, these recommendations are aimed at reinvigorating democratic practices and institutions for the benefit of all generations. One aspect of this is the translation of new concepts and definitions of politics and participation, along with the application of new ICT skills to connect people, society and government.

The research series reinforces the need for more creative thinking about how to address the real barriers to youth participation. We need to think about how to modify existing pathways and create new ones between civic learning (formal or informal), traditional and non-traditional civic engagement and political participation. This will mean stepping outside of collective and individual comfort zones. Let’s park any preconceived ideas and assumptions and avoid simplistic analysis about youth participation. Preparing all youth to become active citizens means creating the conditions and space for authentic interaction with young Canadians, who must be part of the process to develop and implement innovative policy responses and strategies.

Preparing youth for active citizenship calls for educational institutions, governments, families, the community sector, political parties, politicians and the media to all fulfill their respective roles. There are reciprocal relationships between youth and all of these societal actors. Youth make contributions to each of these actors/sectors and in turn receive benefits, and vice versa.

Policies, programs and actions to encourage youth participation need to take the actors, their interdependencies and their interactions into account.

The following discussion advances policy and other actions that should be taken by each of these actors to more fully engage youth in meaningful ways and to support their full participation as citizens. We start with youth themselves because they are, of course, much more than passive targets for these actors. The thrust of this paper is about their active participation. However, we have chosen to place emphasis in this paper on the other actors – schools, governments, families, political parties and community organizations – because they have substantial and pervasive influence over the formative stages of young people’s lives and on their understanding of political and civic participation. We have also included specific commentary on Indigenous youth given their unique place in and relationship to Canada and the civic participation challenges that arise from those realities. Table 2 (page 30) summarizes the policy directions and actions.

## **What Should Be Done?**

### ***Youth Diversity: One Size Does Not Fit All***

In thinking about policies and programs aimed at increasing youth engagement, we first need to carefully consider which youth populations are being targeted. Current policies and programs seem to privilege the already engaged, the overachievers and those who are easiest to reach. We need to carefully consider the specific and complex needs of those who are unengaged, disengaged and most marginalized. We know that youth are not a monolithic group and have, like older Canadians, multiple identities, but public policies do not adequately respond to their diverse realities and identities.

Strategies and programming need to be tailored to address the obstacles facing different groups of youth. Keeping this caution in mind, we draw from the research series and other CPRN work to offer the following policy directions and actions for consideration by youth, policy-makers, educators and community organizations. We hope that they will serve to ignite some urgency and energy into what we see as a pressing priority – ensuring that the young people of Canada are well equipped to take on their citizenship rights and obligations.

### ***Raising the Bar: Deepening Youth Commitment***

While youth are the targets of policies, programs and actions initiated by societal and political institutions, they are also actors in their own right, responsible for their own actions and choices. CPRN youth dialogue reports (2006-2007) set out the citizenship vision and roles that youth participants self-assigned, including playing an active role in their communities and in public and civic institutions. We encourage readers to peruse the action plan prepared by youth participants at the National Dialogue – see CPRN (2006). They see their involvement taking many forms – participating at home and abroad, voting, joining advocacy groups and expressing informed opinions publicly and through the media, consumer action and protests.

The youth and authors involved in this research series added more detail to this picture, as outlined below.

## ***Click On and Check Out Sources***

As citizens, youth have a responsibility to inform themselves of public and political issues, including learning more about political parties, their platforms and their role in democracy. This requires applying a critical lens when consuming information sources, in both mainstream and alternative media. It also means diversifying their sources of information and analysis to get broader perspectives on issues (not simply looking for sources that support biases). Youth need to apply their consumer smarts to media, developing more informed and discerning skills.

## ***Exercise Voice***

Youth, like other citizens, have a right and responsibility to express their opinions and views on public issues to local elected representatives through various means (e.g. writing an opinion piece for a newspaper, phoning a call-in radio show, blogging, participating in a discussion forum, requesting a meeting with the city councillor or local MP, protesting, joining an advocacy group). Discussing public issues among their peers is important, but if at least some of this discussion is not shared with wider audiences, then intergenerational dialogue and the translation of youth discourse suffers. Youth need to understand that, if they do not express their views, their priorities are less likely to be reflected on parties' and governments' agendas.

## ***Engage in Political Discussions***

Young adults need to ask questions about and discuss politics with their parents, friends or teachers. There are institutional and informal avenues and venues available: organizing a political discussion night with friends and family, asking schools or community agencies to create spaces for such opportunities, getting involved in school councils or as class representatives, finding a cause that excites passion and commitment, joining an advocacy group or a youth branch of a political party, working to get causes or issues on party platforms or organizational agendas, etc.

## ***Change Doesn't Come with the Click of the Mouse***

Youth learn, work and play in speeded-up real and virtual worlds. They have come to expect quick response time and instant results. Democracy and public policy change happens at a slower pace. Youth need to understand the different dynamics and realities that shape and condition the public arena. They will need to learn to balance individual needs and desires with organizational, societal and political realities. They also need to temper their expectations and appetite for immediate results to accommodate the different pace and collective imperatives of civic and political life.

## ***Launch a Pan-Canadian Civic Literacy Strategy for Youth***

Civic education remains a singularly important and effective mechanism to address gaps and deficiencies in political knowledge and in preparing youth to undertake the public responsibilities and rights associated with citizenship. However, the kind of civic education we promote matters to the outcomes we are trying to achieve. We need a much more in-depth and sharper discussion to clarify what roles we expect civic education to play in preparing people for active citizenship, especially with respect to which models of citizenship best serve to improve civic literacy.

There is much that educational institutions can do to address civic literacy deficiencies, but it is unrealistic and unfair to expect one institutional actor to single-handedly address such a multi-faceted challenge. As Llewellyn and colleagues remind us, “civic literacy is not and cannot be considered a ‘teacher problem.’ Rather government resources, policy, societal norms and legal change influence the civic culture of schools and the citizenship role of educators” (Llewellyn et al., 2007: 38). Discussions need to engage provincial/territorial and federal governments, political parties, educational institutions, community groups and citizens, including youth. These discussions should explore the different ideological and value-based assumptions that underpin citizenship models. Encouraging such frank and open dialogue is needed if we are to elevate public discourse to a more mature level and be more explicit about the value propositions underlying different choices about citizenship models in Canada.

Achieving the greatest impact and policy coherence calls for the development of a collaborative national strategy (not a top-down federally driven initiative) for improving civic literacy (for all Canadians but with a particular focus on youth). The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) should take the initiative to convene, coordinate and support this process – the Council could build on its pan-Canadian Literacy Action Plan and Forum on Literacy.<sup>11</sup> Citizenship education by definition engages the idea of the “whole” – not just the parts – of Canada. The challenge of engaging 14 different governments (provinces, territories and the federal government) and stakeholders (including educators and youth) in a constructive in-depth dialogue must not serve as an excuse for inaction. We must assemble the collective experiences and wisdom of 13 separate curricula and pedagogies to define core understandings of what knowledge, practices and skill building are needed to support youth for their citizenship roles. The federal government has a crucial role to play in helping to define and elaborate the meaning of citizenship and in collaborating with the provinces/territories on a framework and strategy.

## ***Reframe, Revitalize and Diversify Civic Education***

If civic education is really to become a priority, education policy and program change must elevate its status within governments and schools and among teachers and families. In some provinces, this may mean an overhaul of how it is taught and integrated into the curricula, while in other provinces, it will be more a matter of fine-tuning. In most, if not all, provinces and territories, it will require policy, program and budgetary changes to strengthen and clarify the

---

<sup>11</sup> CMEC is organizing a forum on literacy to be held in the spring of 2008 with the goal of increasing awareness and encouraging collaboration and sharing of information, developing tools for professional development and framing discussions on literacy. See the September 25, 2007, press release (“Education Ministers Announce Major Pan-Canadian Forum on Literacy”) at [www.cmec.ca/releases/press.en.stm?id=52](http://www.cmec.ca/releases/press.en.stm?id=52).

role of civic education within schools; to involve youth in determining their learning needs and in designing programs to address them; and to provide teachers with the training, supports and resources they will need to fulfill more demanding roles. Fortunately, there is a wealth of research in Canada and abroad from which to build.<sup>12</sup>

In order to realize the ambitious goal of preparing all youth to become active citizens, alternative styles and approaches to skills acquisition and learning are needed, especially given the diversity of the student population. CMEC could play a valuable role in collecting, distilling and disseminating best and good practices and resources to schools across the country. Educational faculties and teachers will need to incorporate new approaches that involve innovative partnerships with civil society and political institutions to develop more meaningful forms of learning about citizenship. These would involve greater use of co-op placements with activist and political organizations, workshops and roundtables engaging youth and politicians, and modelling democratic practice within schools. Why not create opportunities for students to participate in a range of activities (beyond the usual fundraising roles and traditional school council models) that offer skill and capacity building? The more inclusive schools and campuses offer opportunities for youth to develop important citizenship skills and a sense of belonging, of efficacy and ownership (including giving credits for extracurricular activities and official recognition for civic involvement). Such approaches are particularly important to engage hard-to-reach and marginalized youth. The needs of those who are not in school – those who drop out and never return and those who return as adults – also must be addressed in appropriate and effective ways.

These initiatives must have the active support of policy-makers, especially in empowering educators to revamp the practice and pedagogy of civic learning in schools and in community-based settings.

### ***Focus on the Role of Faculties of Education in Preparing Teachers for Civics***

The pedagogy of teaching civics deserves special attention because it involves so much more than the simple acquisition of political knowledge and historical facts. In that regard, faculties of education have key roles to play in promoting best-practice teaching approaches to better prepare teachers to develop their students' understanding of citizenship and their acquisition of skills, attitudes and aptitudes needed to be active, informed citizens. This includes modelling methods of talking about controversial public issues in a way that opens up, rather than shuts down, dialogue for understanding and respectful, constructive debate. This role is particularly important because too many teachers themselves lack political knowledge. The deficit is even more pronounced among the more recent cohort of student teachers, who have been ill-prepared for civics teaching.

---

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Sears, 2006; Crick, 1998. See also citized's e-journal *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* at [www.citized.info/?strand=6](http://www.citized.info/?strand=6).

## ***Find New Pathways on Contested Ground: Indigenous Youth Education and Citizenship***

The teaching and practice of citizenship in the context of Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) governance is complex, to say the least. Some Indigenous youth are taught on First Nations' reserve schools, by Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. Others are part of mainstream schools that have no Indigenous teachers. High school dropout rates are much higher for Indigenous youth than for non-Indigenous students. The realities of youth living on- and off-reserve vary and call for alternative approaches to civic education. Education and government authorities cannot ignore the fact that the very concept of citizenship in Canada is contested by some Indigenous leaders and educators. This situation is further complicated because there is no such thing as a single Indigenous political identity – and this contributes to Indigenous youth's *ambiguity and uncertainty about their identity and sense of belonging in Canada*.

Prescribing policy recommendations for this complex issue is well beyond the scope of this paper. What can be stated is that Indigenous youth have a right to be exposed to appropriately delivered and sensitively designed civic education that allows them to develop a sense of their own political identity and an appreciation for the different citizenship concepts at play. Schools, Indigenous communities and governments can work in partnership to ensure that Indigenous youth understand the concepts and practice of civic rights and responsibilities, within their own Indigenous context and in the broader Canadian political society.

Education strategies are needed to help Indigenous youth integrate their identity, political awareness and education. Education opportunities and avenues for political participation that include respect for the practices and principles of traditional Indigenous governance (role and authorities of the elders, clan mothers and hereditary chiefs) may be the most appropriate for some and need to be explored. Non-Indigenous Canadians will need to bring an open mind and an accommodating attitude to this discussion, as traditional Indigenous governance does not mesh well with western society's ideas about democratic governance in the 21st century.

Non-Indigenous students also would benefit from learning about the rich diversity of Indigenous history and culture to improve their level of knowledge and understanding about the place of Indigenous communities and cultures in Canada. More focus on their diverse histories and cultures and open dialogue can clarify understandings and bring to the surface core value differences for deeper exploration and negotiation.

## ***Make Representative Government More Participatory***

While a majority of Canadians are calling for more participatory democratic practices, youth are particularly impatient with hierarchical, top-down practices (CPRN, 2006). For these cognitively mobilized youth, the formal processes and hierarchical organizational structures of representative government provide little in the way of satisfying and results-oriented practices. Some of the measures that could make politics more attractive to youth include these: electoral reform, discussion about lowering voter age to 16, strengthening the role of parliamentary committees and backbenchers, lessening the excessive control of the Prime Minister's Office (Turnbull and

Aucoin, 2006),<sup>13</sup> elevating the tone and content of Question Period, enhancing the role of constituency offices in policy (MacLeod, 2005) and generally institutionalizing public engagement in policy processes.

Wherever possible, participatory decision-making structures ought to be adopted, fully supported, and implemented. This necessarily involves the ceding of a measure of political power but brings with it a host of benefits in the form of more engaged, informed and involved citizenry. The Ontario Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform is a compelling recent example of how quickly and intensely high school students engaged and contributed to a complex democratic issue.<sup>14</sup> This and other examples of youth engagement in politics and civic issues (e.g. TakingItGlobal, Apathy is Boring, Centre of Excellence on Youth Engagement, Student Vote, Canada25) demonstrate that political institutions have an impressive array of youth partners with which to work.

### ***Create a Federal Ministerial Portfolio and Strategy Framework for Youth Policy***

Canada, unlike many OECD countries, has no pan-Canadian youth strategy framework. For its part, the federal government has not demonstrated that youth are a priority file – no federal minister has specific mandated responsibility for the youth portfolio. Responsibility for the youth file is spread across a large number of departments without any institutionalized policy coordination body or mechanism. The demographic challenges of an aging workforce/population and declining fertility rates, changing patterns of family formation (youth remaining or returning home in their 20s, delayed family formation), the declining youth vote, low levels of youth civic literacy and other signs of disconnect between young Canadians and governments point to the need for the development of an integrated and comprehensive federal-provincial/territorial youth policy framework. Fortunately, provincial and municipal counterparts and other countries (Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, Australia) provide good models from which to learn.<sup>15</sup>

While a pan-Canadian strategy obviously demands close intergovernmental collaboration, there is much that the federal government can do within its own areas of responsibility. The design of a federal government policy and program framework must include the creation of institutionalized mechanisms such as a national youth council and advisory bodies that are given sufficient resources and secretariat support. These bodies must have real power if they are to be taken seriously by youth.

As noted, the development of a comprehensive strategy with policy, program and service components must be created in concert with youth partners and, of course, provincial and territorial governments. Such federal and intergovernmental actions would send a strong positive

---

<sup>13</sup> Turnbull and Aucoin (2006: 32) note: "More than in any of the other major Westminster systems, the Canadian government (federally and provincially) is subject to an excessive concentration of power."

<sup>14</sup> Go to [www.studentsassembly.ca/](http://www.studentsassembly.ca/) to view a copy of the process and outcome of the Assembly.

<sup>15</sup> With its Youth Secretariat, Quebec is one of the leaders as far as youth engagement is concerned (see [www.jeunes.gouv.qc.ca/index.htm](http://www.jeunes.gouv.qc.ca/index.htm)). Other provinces, such as Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, have also shown leadership in integrating youth advisory committees/secretariats into their departmental mandates. Some municipal governments, like Toronto (with its Youth Cabinet), Halton Region and Vancouver City Council, have instituted a range of innovative mechanisms and practices to seek out and integrate youth voices.

message in terms of the government's commitment to youth-relevant and youth-friendly policy and its confidence in engaging youth as partners in the creation of a pan-Canadian strategy. It would signal to youth that they are important and would be a great capacity and skill-building exercise for those involved. However, youth have highly developed authenticity antennae. Government actions need to be genuinely engaging and reflective of their needs and interests.

### ***Engage and Support Youth-Based and Youth-Serving Organizations***

Young Canadians are engaging in individualized results-oriented political action and are looking for more meaningful involvement. Given this orientation, it makes sense for governments to work with organizations that appeal to youth's sensibilities. However, we also know that many young people don't understand how their various forms of civic and political engagement connect to and influence public policy. Governments should more consciously work with leading edge youth-serving and youth-based civil organizations to develop strategies and approaches to help young people make the linkages between the activities in which they engage and public policy (e.g. engaging them in discussion on the roles of government and civil society in achieving change, helping them make the connections between their actions and policy). Policies designed to assist volunteer organizations in their recruitment, organization, development and other functions should exploit opportunities to increase levels of civic literacy. Indigenous youth-led and youth-focused groups, student associations and sports groups are well positioned to get youth talking about political issues, gaining political knowledge and learning the necessary skills to engage from their peers or mentors. Supporting or creating such opportunities would be a good investment in the future of all youth.

### ***Harness the Potential of Interactive ICT to Engage Youth***

Governments and political parties lag well behind young people, the private sector and media in understanding and exploiting the power of ICT to help transform relationships between people and organizations, citizens and their governments. For example, web-based media such as blogs, forums and chat lines have changed the traditional relationship between the producer/editor/distributor on the one hand and the public as receiver and consumer on the other, to one where the user is an active participant and producer of news, as well as a consumer (Ferguson, 2006).

Governments in Canada have for the most part concentrated on the application of ICT to improve service provision (transactional activities) and provide one-way information to citizens. There are some promising examples that could be replicated, such as the interactive online consultation on the Pension Plan Disability Program (led by MP Carolyn Bennett) of the House of Commons Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the webcast hearings of the Ontario Standing Committee on Social Policy on the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (Borins et al., 2007). However, in general, governments have been much slower to adapt these technologies to engage citizens, especially younger citizens, in policy (Borins et al., 2007).<sup>16</sup> ICT is not yet routinely seen as a tool to construct new paths to connect with citizens (either individually or as a collective) on policy development or implementation. Traditional

---

<sup>16</sup> Borins and Brown (2007: 253-276) conclude that "both governments [Ontario and federal] have been much more aggressive in developing online capabilities in providing services to the public than in the policy-making process."

approaches to political engagement studies need to adapt and integrate these new technologies and take advantage of their reach and speed.

Many of the recommendations assigned to government in the previous section need to be adapted for First Nations, Inuit and Métis governance institutions in Canada. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on this issue, the paper by Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat (2007) makes it clear that Indigenous governments have a distance to go in effectively engaging Indigenous youth in their respective civic and political spheres.

### ***Overcome Political Parties' Self-Fulfilling Prophecies about Youth***

Parties are presently caught in a vicious cycle. Youth see parties as old-fashioned and irrelevant institutions that are out of touch and disconnected from their reality, so they give them a wide berth. Parties, seeing that fewer youth vote than any other age cohort and that even fewer hold party memberships, seem to largely write them off. Breaking the cycle won't happen unless parties deliberately and systematically reach out to youth to integrate them in a reinvigorated policy-making process and agenda that speaks to youth realities and interests in language they understand.

### ***Promote Youth Policy that Speaks to Their Values, Interests and Needs***

Parties are unlikely to be successful in attracting significant numbers of youth unless they are prepared to invest in thoughtful policy development processes and policy agendas that speak to youth values, realities and preference for hands-on involvement. Parties' policy platforms are largely unknown by youth. When these platforms are known, they are usually discredited as evolving through a top-down process – with a surplus of executive control and a modicum of member input. They have been discounted for not adequately reflecting youth's values and desires. As such, parties must do a better job of instilling in young Canadians the desire and motivation to participate in electoral politics. At a minimum, this means systematic consideration of age cohort or generational needs and interests. But this will not suffice. The crafting of more innovative and informed policies needs to engage youth directly and imaginatively. Such an investment could reap benefits beyond greater engagement of youth – it could attract others as well.

### ***Democratize Political Party Structures and Practices***

Youth are skeptical of parties as institutions and perceive them to be hierarchical organizations that are not welcoming to young people. To reverse this perception, internal reforms to party practices and machinery are needed. In particular, youth need to see more meaningful involvement of individual party members, especially from youth and other marginalized populations, in the policy process and party direction – beyond the moments of leadership selection and candidate nomination.

Parties need to do a better job of improving their image and demonstrating to all Canadians, and to youth in particular, that they play an important role in stimulating and leading national debates on policy issues and are capable of generating and implementing new policy ideas. Although not all may agree that formal youth wings within political parties are a good idea, some mechanisms

are needed to reach out to and retain youth. Designating youth positions within party executives and revitalizing campus clubs and youth groups are some ways of demonstrating serious intention and communicating the message that youth are important. However, this needs to be more than a communication strategy – it needs to be part of a civic literacy strategy. Political parties should demonstrate leadership in collaborating with schools, governments and civil society on the development and implementation of a civic literacy strategy. After all, it is in the parties' interests to do so – a better understanding of the political system could reactivate interest in the role of parties in democracy. Parties need to play an active, not a passive, role in that process.

### ***Adopt Innovative Recruitment and Retention Strategies***

Political parties are also doing a poor job of exploiting the possibilities of ICT to mobilize, attract and retain youth (and the broader population, for that matter). Again, parties need to think outside the box and find new innovative ways to reach young Canadians. More creative use of the Internet and other new media, with their capacity to encourage the development of virtual communities, would serve parties well in their efforts to recruit a new generation of members.

Important though the Internet is to engage large numbers of youth, the role of personal interaction cannot be overemphasized. Personal connections and outreach (Young and Cross, 2007) to recruit new youth members seems to be a particularly effective method, and yet it is rarely done – this is one approach that should be expanded.

Resources should be allocated for the creation/maintenance of a vibrant network of campus and youth clubs. But as Young and Cross caution, such groups need to provide both social and political opportunities for youth. Social incentives are more important for young people, as other older potential members already have well-established social networks.

### ***Rethink Indigenous Youth Participation in Electoral Politics and Traditional Governance***

Although a contested issue, Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat (2007) reject recommended strategies that emphasize getting Indigenous youth to participate in the Canadian electoral processes, improving institutional capacity and asserting political will. This perspective is challenged by others, including some Indigenous youth, who believe that more effective strategies are needed to attract Indigenous youth living on- and off-reserve to participate in Canadian political life, including voting. This being said, others argue that Indigenous youth should also be supported to participate in traditional Indigenous governance that has been passed down from centuries past. These are not mutually exclusive paths to political participation. Having a strong understanding of their historical and political roots and political traditions may be the first step needed to inspire Indigenous youth to get involved in Canadian electoral politics.

Similarly to other youth, Indigenous youth also need to be engaged meaningfully at all levels of the policy-making process. The focus should be on the broader goal of encouraging political engagement and participation in decision-making systems. This goes beyond simply voting to addressing the consequences of colonization. It means supporting the re-establishment of

channels for their involvement that fit culturally with their sense of identity and their notions of the collective identity that is rooted in their Indigeneity. However, this area needs additional attention – research shows that Indigenous youth simultaneously hold multiple and sometimes conflicting identities.

These are complex issues because they call into question the kind of relationships that Indigenous youth want to have with their own historical communities and governance structures, on the one hand, and with the Canadian state and band councils constituted by that very state, on the other hand. It is important to get Indigenous youth perspectives and preferences represented in the current electoral system. Political parties and institutions need to facilitate such engagement.

If Alfred and colleagues are correct about Indigenous youth needing to focus and direct their political energy and enthusiasm at the local level as the main site of their political engagement, political leaders in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities need to accommodate this requirement in their political and policy practices.

### ***Realign Opportunities with Youth Motivations for Engagement with the Community Sector***

The study by Thibault, Albertus and Fortier (2007) concludes that some leaders of non-governmental organizations in Quebec misunderstand youth motivations for involvement and sometimes misread the real obstacles and challenges to greater youth engagement. Although it is not possible to generalize from this one study to the rest of Canada, some of their recommendations also apply to the community sector writ large, in particular the need to:

- personally connect and interact to recruit and retain youth involvement;
- employ ICT in ways that engage youth;
- provide reciprocal relationships whereby youth are seen not just as “sweat labour” but as real members with meaningful roles and responsibilities;
- tailor recruitment and retention strategies to the needs of particular subgroups of youth (one size doesn’t fit all);
- bring youth into organizational and policy decision-making and leadership positions; and
- listen to understand the real hurdles to involvement and tailor strategies and policies to address them.

Youth engage in a variety of ways. Community organization volunteers and staff would do well to carefully assess why and how youth in their respective communities engage in order to target an appropriate recruitment strategy and design recruitment tactics. Surveys such as the National Survey of Volunteering, Giving and Participating, 2004 indicate that a majority of youth are attracted to sport and recreation activities. It makes sense to build tactics around this reality. These preferences should become part of a strategy to attract youth to different organizations.

## ***Leverage Community Organizations' Trusted Status to Raise Youth Civic Literacy***

Governments should do much more to support community-based and larger provincial/regional/national not-for-profit organizations to attract youth to participate in civic and political activities. For their part, these organizations also have some obligation to play a more active role in helping young people understand the connections, interdependencies and differences between civil society, governments, politics and policy. The importance of the community sector is no way diminished by enabling youth to develop a more sophisticated grasp of the complexity of policy-making and governance and the role and limits of civil society in democratic societies (acknowledging that societal change requires the collaborative efforts of all actors while recognizing that only governments are accountable to all and have the responsibility to govern for all). Because youth place a high trust in community organizations (far higher than in politicians and governments), this sector is well positioned to play a larger role in contributing to civic literacy (with appropriate funding support).

## ***Start at Home: Families as Agents and Role Models for Civic and Political Literacy and Engagement***

Families are a primary agent of political socialization. Early childhood and adolescent socialization is an important indicator of political attitudes and behaviour across the spectrum: from voting, to political interest and literacy, to becoming a party member, to running for office. The research suggests that the family is even more important in shaping the political behaviour of young women. Families provide political information and knowledge both directly and indirectly, transmit beliefs and values regarding the political system and represent important role models of political engagement. For all these reasons, governments would do well to support families in helping to inculcate citizenship values, knowledge and skills in their children (e.g. policies to support better work-family life balance would help).

Canadian political literacy (for all ages) is lower than in many OECD countries (Milner, 2002), which points to the need for a broad civic literacy strategy that addresses all age groups. Families would be better equipped to discuss and model good citizenship if governments and politicians could get over their reluctance to create safe public spaces to facilitate these conversations. It does not help that public discourse about what it means to be a citizen of Canada – what are our mutual obligations and rights – is tentative, often unfocused and happening too much in narrow enclaves rather than in truly public spheres.

Nonetheless, there is much that families can still do to embrace their socialization role in helping their children become politically literate. Families can keep abreast, to the extent possible, of public and controversial issues; talk about these issues with their children starting at an early age; encourage kids to express their political views even if different from their own; help youth connect the dots between their everyday struggles and policy at every level of government; make going to the polls an important family event and then stay up late to watch the results; join and participate in a political party or advocacy/ public interest group; find a cause family members all care about and get involved; volunteer as a family activity; and talk to their children about what they are learning in civics and other related classes and fill the gaps.

While families are key agents of political socialization, strategies devised by governments and schools need to take into account the combination of barriers (socio-economic, time and attitudinal) that families face in fulfilling this role. These make it very difficult for too many families to adequately help their children develop political identity and a solid understanding of citizenship.

**Table 2. Summary of Policy Directions and Actions**

Policy/Action	Actors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch a civic literacy framework and strategy               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Create a Pan-Canadian civic literacy strategy                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Seek consensus on goals, citizenship models, learning outcomes</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Reframe and revitalize civic education                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Identify, document and disseminate promising and good practices, for diverse populations</li> <li>→ Develop benchmarks for knowledge on the role, meaning and purpose of elections within democracy</li> <li>→ Engage and support teachers (resources and tools, training) and cultivate partnerships with community and political institutions (including community service learning programs)</li> <li>→ Strengthen role of faculties of education in preparing educators for citizenship teaching</li> <li>→ Engage youth in determining learning needs and in designing programs</li> <li>→ Integrate media education skills development as part of citizenship education</li> <li>→ Develop materials, tools and supports geared to youth whose families are recent immigrants</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Create pathways and provide supports for Indigenous youth education</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) to take a lead in convening stakeholders (federal-provincial/territorial, educational institutions, youth and youth-based/serving organizations, researchers)</li> <li>• Governments</li> <li>• Educators</li> <li>• Families</li> <li>• Political institutions</li> <li>• Youth groups</li> <li>• Community-based organizations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratize governance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Make representative government more participatory                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Lessen executive control and strengthen the role of parliamentary committees and backbenchers</li> <li>→ Institutionalize public engagement in policy</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governments</li> <li>• Politicians</li> <li>• Political parties</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate federal leadership around youth policy               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Create a federal ministerial portfolio/ strategic framework for youth policy/programs                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Institutionalize mechanisms (e.g. National Youth Council and Secretariat)</li> <li>→ Realize potential of ICT to engage youth as citizens</li> <li>→ Engage/support youth-based/serving organizations</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal government</li> <li>• Youth groups</li> <li>• Community-based organizations</li> </ul>

Policy/Action	Actors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renew political parties to overcome self-fulfilling prophecies about youth               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop policy that connects with youth values, interests and needs</li> <li>○ Democratize party structures and practices</li> <li>○ Adopt innovative recruitment and retention strategies</li> <li>○ Rethink how to engage Indigenous youth in electoral and traditional (Indigenous) politics</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political parties</li> <li>• Indigenous governments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realign community sector engagement strategies               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tailor opportunities to appeal to youth motivations, interests and needs</li> <li>○ Leverage trust to build civic literacy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based organizations, national/regional/provincial not-for-profit organizations, foundations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support families in becoming citizen role models               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recognize families as primary agents of political and civic socialization and identity formation</li> <li>○ Support their role in helping to raise civic literacy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Community organizations</li> <li>• Governments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge/elevate youth responsibility               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Become more discriminating consumers of news and public issues                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Diversify news sources</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Exercise voice</li> <li>○ Engage in political issues</li> <li>○ Balance personal with collective needs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual youth</li> <li>• Youth-serving and youth-based organizations</li> </ul>

## **4. What We Need to Learn: A Research Agenda**

This section identifies research gaps, limitations and challenges emerging from the research series. It highlights important research priorities to advance our understanding and inform policy interventions and actions to support and encourage youth civic and political participation (Table 3 on page 38 summarizes the research priorities).

### **Voting: Understand Motivations and Tailor Incentives**

While there are different academic perspectives on how much importance to give to declining voter turnout among youth within the broader field of youth participation, most will agree that it warrants further attention. The research strongly suggests that those who are engaged are also most likely to vote and that early voting behaviour is the most likely predictor of voting habits later in life (O'Neill, 2007). The research and policy question – what would encourage more youth to make informed choices at the ballot box – has not been adequately answered. Furthermore, we need to better understand the effects of early childhood socialization on voter turnout.

Several studies, including CPRN's work with young people, make it clear that hectoring young people into voting does not work. In fact, it is likely to turn them off even more. For some, the act of not voting is viewed as a personal political act that demonstrates a rejection of the status quo political system. Llewellyn and associates reference Henry Milner's explanation of the two kinds of young non-voters – “those who are ‘politically informed’ and reject voting for something they consider more meaningful, and those who ‘lack the information to adequately distinguish among the candidate and/or parties” (Milner, 2002, in Llewellyn et al., 2007: 23). Different policies are needed for these different groups. Turcotte argues that there is a need to explore possible means to “re-enfranchise” young voters, but first, we need to better understand the reasons why they are opting out of voting in such large numbers and isolate the changes required to bring them back (Turcotte, 2007: 20).

### **Probe ICT: New Ways of Participating**

How is technology changing the relationships between young people and their governments, and among youth themselves? How can we harness new technologies to strengthen those relationships? Is technology leading to an increasingly individualistic society? Has (and if so, how has) the World Wide Web contributed to youth's heightened sense of global community and altered their ideas about citizenship? Is the Internet becoming a public institution in and of itself? We need to better understand how youth are using new information technologies to gather information, get inspired, mobilize and engage.

New quasi-public spaces for social networking and interaction between people, such as text messages, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Wikipedia, blogs and alternative news sites, are evolving at a rapid pace. How do youth use them to understand the world, share information, mobilize and create new global communities? What influence do cyber friends and celebrity sites (that promote their global philanthropy) have on political socialization and actions? How can governments, parties and civil society make better use of ICT to reach youth and engage them in

policy issues? How can skills such as listening and accommodation, important in policy-making, be taught and used in this virtual space? Should communication methods such as blogging be treated as a learned skill in Civics or Social Studies curriculum guidelines (Llewellyn et al., 2007)?

The changing nature of the media factors into questions about the use of technology. As O’Neill quotes (from Saunders, forthcoming: 23), “if we are to fully understand how to re-engage youth in formal political channels, we need to first understand how media – old and new – contribute to the formation of political understanding and political identity” (O’Neill, 2007: 23).

While it may be that youth are not in tune with politics, one could also argue that the mainstream media is not in tune with youth. We need to examine how the mainstream media may be contributing to youth disinterest in and relative ignorance of politics. Is it the medium or is it the message? How could the media do a better job of connecting youth with ideas about civic responsibilities? How could the media help youth make the connection between their everyday lives and politics? These questions raise a broader issue about how to create the conditions that encourage the growth of civic journalism in Canada.

### **Civics/Citizenship Education: Getting Political in the Classroom**

As most of the research papers state, Canada’s youth have low political knowledge when compared with other generations. Canadian and American youth are similar in this respect but differ from European youth, especially those from Scandinavian countries.<sup>17</sup> Empirical research, including comparative work, on pedagogic approaches and civics teaching practices is needed to understand how to create politically and socially just classrooms.

How much do we really know about how civics and citizenship learning is actually done in the classrooms of the nation? What are the most effective pedagogies and practices in Canada and abroad that prepare young people to embrace their citizenship roles with confidence and conviction? In particular, Canada would benefit from comparative work on electoral education to identify successful models of electoral education for inclusion in Civics curricula. How can the Civics curriculum be adapted to fill the gaps and to give youth the skills they need to become full citizens? Also, are different methods and materials needed to reach the most disaffected and unengaged youth to help them realize their full citizenship potential? This series and other research have begun to answer some of these questions, but we need more empirical research on classroom practice to deepen our knowledge and inform changes in policy and practices.

What are the best classroom practices (in Canada and abroad) that could be adapted by teachers to help them to foster open and respectful dialogue and debate on contentious social and political issues of the day in culturally diverse settings? Community service learning models seem to have been effective in other countries but are relatively new in Canada. How could community service learning be used to support civic education and encourage civic engagement? How can civics education alter youth’s perspectives on the role or function of governments, political parties,

---

<sup>17</sup> See also Chapter 3 (“What Do Canadians Know About Politics?”) in Gidengil et al., 2004a; and Chapter 4 (“Civic Literacy in Comparative Context”) in Milner, 2002. Canada participated only in phase 1 of the IEA Civics Education Project, so Milner and others use a range of proxy indicators to measure the political knowledge of youth.

civil society and our democratic system? What kind of citizen do we want to shape? Should programs focus less on creating obedient citizens and more on teaching youth how to apply critical analysis, question the status quo and effect change? This last question (the answers for which depend on one's concept of citizenship) raises significant policy implications that were referenced in Section 3.

What are the relationships, links and interactions between political knowledge, values, interest and participation? We need to examine the extent to which youth have the capacity to apply political knowledge in the civic arena, beyond hypothetical situations in the classroom. What kind of skills do schools consider to be "legitimate" for political action? Does political protest have a place in school curricula along with the Charter? We need to tackle the question of how to best support schools and teachers in dealing with "the controversies of controversial issues." Youth have told us that they believe schools should be a "safe place" to have meaningful political discussions on issues that matter to them (CPRN, 2007).

What are the successes and failures from which we can learn? How can schools and communities work together to raise civic awareness and promote sustainable engagement of youth in or out of school settings – beyond simply getting a class credit or fulfilling mandatory requirements for volunteering?

### **Unpack Youth Diversity**

Youth are not a homogeneous group, but all of them are greatly impacted by education. Level of education is the single most important indicator of engagement – engaged youth are the most likely to have a post-secondary education. About half of all Canadian youth aren't enrolled in any post-secondary program. Researchers studying youth participation need to take this into account in designing surveys and qualitative work. Disaggregated data on subgroups are needed to build the research knowledge about the effects of gender, ethnicity (in its own great diversity), culture, religion, income and citizenship on levels and areas of engagement, as well as the interplay and complexity of the various roles and identities with socio-demographic indicators. We also need to look at differences between urban and rural settings, as well as provincial variations (O'Neill, 2007).

In the narrow definition of informal politics, "the activities preferred by girls ... tend to be neglected in participation research, or they are sometimes dismissed as not being strictly political" (Hooghe et al., 2004: 19). Considering that young women are mostly engaged in informal political arenas (O'Neill, 2007; Young and Cross, 2007), it would appear that they are flying under the radar of what is being studied.

Even less is known about young Indigenous women. The Indigenous youth paper (Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007) reveals interesting perceptions of some young Indigenous women who refer to band councils as "old boys' clubs," a term often used to describe mainstream political arenas as well. More research is required to unravel the complexities of the relationships that these women have with both Indigenous (traditional and band council) and non-Indigenous politicians and governments.

There is so little research done on Indigenous youth and participation that we tend to overlook the fact that they do not speak in unison either. There is a great need to deepen and broaden our understanding of Indigenous youth's attitudes, motivations, aspirations, expectations and experiences of political and civic participation to uncover commonalities and differences. This calls for thoughtfully constructed surveys and face-to-face interviews, conducted by or in collaboration with Indigenous scholars and graduate students. It would be highly desirable to design and implement longitudinal/panel surveys (e.g. by studying a selected group of individuals over a period of many years) that would allow researchers to track data over time and compare cohorts of Indigenous youth.

## **Embrace Methodological Pluralism**

Mainstream political behaviour research often relies on standardized questionnaires to collect data. These are relatively straightforward, lend themselves well to generalization to the broader population and facilitate research with a comparative perspective. However, they lack the richness and depth of qualitative methods and do not allow us to “achieve a complex and well-rounded understanding of participation” (Vromen, 2003: 83). A recurring theme in the papers in this series (reinforced by a recent UK study of youth participation in politics<sup>18</sup>) is the need for youth participation research to combine qualitative in-depth analysis of smaller-scale studies with large-scale quantitative surveys. This would serve to paint a more accurate picture of youth engagement in Canada.

All of the authors in this research series, and others such as Vromen (2003) and Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007), have argued for disaggregated quantitative data, as youth are far from being a monolithic group. For example, to identify and understand youth behaviours and attitudes about politics and engagement, it is important to take the time to understand and use the lexicon of the population being studied. As several authors point out, this is often not the case. How do young women, newcomers, Inuit, on- and off-reserve Indigenous youth, Métis, at-risk youth, those without post-secondary education and recent graduates conceive the different roles and responsibilities of citizenship? What are the commonalities and differences in how they think about and engage in political and civil society? What issues do they think are important? What needs to change to get more of them voting? Open-ended questions and inductive research, in combination with other more quantitative approaches, may also help redefine the more problematic concepts that will move us beyond generalities to more nuanced knowledge. Improving research methods and results should help policy-makers and educators tailor responses to real, rather than perceived needs.

---

<sup>18</sup> Sloam contends that a “qualitative, bottom up approach is important to help contextualize the findings of quantitative surveys within young people’s own discursive frameworks. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data thus can provide a convincing, three-dimensional analysis” (Sloam 2007: 554).

## **Create Longitudinal Data Sets**

The research papers conclude that a combination of life cycle and generational effects go a long way to explaining the trends and patterns of youth participation. Understanding these effects with greater certainty and precision is critical when deciding on policy approaches. Researchers now have to rely on cross-sectional survey data from which they make inferences on the factors that can influence social behaviour. Unfortunately, as survey questions get dropped, wording gets changed or new variables are measured. Comparisons over time become a challenge.

As O’Neill (2007) and others argue, longitudinal data are needed to study attitudes and behaviours regarding voting, civic and political engagement and political literacy. Over time, such surveys would help to differentiate between life cycle and generational effects. More specifically, they would help to identify the pathways to different forms of engagement or contextualize modifications of attitudes over time. Longitudinal databases have been created for health and socio-economic research, so why not for the health of our democracy?

A good example of the need for longitudinal data is the impact of high schools’ mandatory volunteering on the longer-term civic and political engagement of students. Thibault, Albertus and Fortier (2007), as well as Llewellyn et al. (2007) and Stolle and Cruz (2005), are skeptical, especially since many youth resent this volunteering. Do these programs shape citizenship and civic learning, and if so, how? What socio-demographics are at play? More research is required before we can answer these questions with any confidence.

## **Expand Definitions and Clarify Concepts**

Definitional ambiguity, contested language, and confusion about nomenclature are all at play in the research field of youth participation. It is important to name and address these challenges because they get in the way of understanding what is really going on.

As noted by Llewellyn et al. (2007: 17), “there is some indication of underreporting of certain kinds of civic involvement among youth due to discursive variation.” We know from qualitative research and CPRN’s dialogues that young people do discuss public issues that could be construed as “political” (global injustice, environmental sustainability, war, bilingualism, working conditions, high tuition fees, multiculturalism, etc.) but may not equate such “talk” with the world of politics or policy (CRIC, 2003; MacKinnon and Watling, 2006; Vromen, 2003). If youth are not connecting these dots, does this suggest that youth in Canada are discussing politics and policy without even knowing it? Are surveys that use traditional notions of politics – or don’t translate terms like “policy” and “politics” into concepts that youth understand – missing out on important findings?

The papers by Thibault, Albertus and Fortier (2007) and Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat (2007) argue that these concepts are also loaded with cultural meanings. In Quebec, as politically or civically active as they may be, youth reject the term “volunteering” and the label of “volunteer,” at least in part because of its clerical communitarian flavour. They prefer the term “civic engagement.” While these results may or may not apply to youth in the rest of Canada, they do speak to the influence of culture and religion on engagement. Some Indigenous youth, when

asked what participation meant to them, defined it as simply going to school or talking to others about political issues (Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007). How can we best capture these realities in surveys and research?

Thibault, Albertus and Fortier (2007) suggest that youth have a much more fluid conception of volunteering or engagement that rarely corresponds to older generations' ideas. Both this research group and Alfred et al. promote and use inductive approaches to revisit some definitions and get a better sense of how youth understand these ambiguous concepts. Although not all researchers are prepared to reassess the traditional definitions, some are calling for a broader discourse to avoid underestimating or discounting the ways in which young people are engaging.

### **Informal and Formal Participation: Continuum or Displacement?**

The papers support the idea that youth today are not apathetic about political issues per se but are turned off by formal partisan politics. While youth shy away from political parties, they are much more likely to engage in informal and non-traditional advocacy type groups (O'Neill, 2007; Young and Cross, 2007). New forms of engagement activities extend to direct action techniques and actions (sometimes without any connection to organized groups) that fall through the cracks of what has been traditionally considered as political or civic action (Thibault, Albertus and Fortier, 2007; O'Neill, 2007).

Interestingly, Young and Cross have found that both party members and advocacy group members think advocacy groups are much better equipped to effect positive change. Young people see political parties as very hierarchical organizations that are out of touch and disinterested in youth priorities. The case of disengagement with political parties is even more compelling for young women (O'Neill, 2007; Young and Cross, 2007) and Indigenous youth (Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat, 2007). In Quebec, Thibault, Albertus and Fortier (2007) have found that youth engage in politics *instead* of volunteering in the community. The paper does not tell us, however, whether this engagement is in formal political parties or advocacy groups.

On the other hand, others have argued that youth engage in non-traditional political activity "*in addition to*" not "*instead of*," traditional partisan politics and voting (Gidengil et al., 2004a). Young and Cross (2007) conclude that it is difficult to demonstrate conclusively that the decline in party membership is contributing to increased engagement through advocacy-type organizations.<sup>19</sup> The pathways between the different types of formal and informal participation are not well marked: further research on this topic is necessary to design appropriate policies and programs.

---

<sup>19</sup> At CPRN's May 16, 2007, roundtable, Henry Milner made reference to research under way in France that suggests a negative correlation between the level of volunteering and traditional political participation.

**Table 3. Summary of Research Questions and Priorities**

Theme	Question	Priorities
<b>Voting</b>	<p>What strategies, policies and approaches are most effective in encouraging youth to become more informed voters?</p> <p>What electoral education strategies have proven successful in other countries?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct empirical research to develop a better understanding of the effects of early childhood socialization on political attitudes and behaviours.</li> <li>• Design and conduct a longitudinal survey and in-depth empirical research to examine which youth are opting out of voting, including identifying and isolating the changes required to bring them back.</li> <li>• Undertake research to identify which policies would work best for different categories of non-voters, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→the politically informed who reject voting; and</li> <li>→the politically illiterate, who lack the necessary information and grasp of politics.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Conduct research on electoral education strategies to identify the most effective approaches and the factors and conditions that contribute to success.</li> </ul>
<b>Civics Education</b>	<p>What kind of Civics curricula is needed to help give youth the skills they need to become full citizens?</p> <p>What are the best classroom practices to foster open and respectful dialogue on contentious social and political issues in a culturally diverse setting?</p> <p>How can schools and communities work together to raise civic awareness and favour sustainable engagement of youth in or out of school?</p> <p>Are community service learning programs effective in raising civic literacy and encouraging civic and political engagement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct empirical research at the national level, informed by comparative research on the pedagogic approaches and civics teaching practices (including community service learning models) best suited to creating politically and socially just classrooms.</li> <li>• Undertake a study with theoretical and empirical components to better understand the cause and effect relationships that shape youth's sense of civic responsibility.</li> </ul>

Theme	Question	Priorities
<b>Unpacking Youth Diversity</b>	What are the commonalities and differences among various youth subgroups (ethno-cultural youth, newcomers, Indigenous youth, young women, youth with disabilities, marginalized youth, youth with or without post-secondary education, etc.) in relation to their understanding of and participation in civic and political society?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake quantitative and qualitative surveys on these subgroups to examine how Indigeneity, gender, ethnicity (in its own great diversity), culture, religion, income, newcomer status and citizenship influence and impact on levels and areas of engagement, as well as to study the interplay and complexity of the various roles and identities with socio-demographic indicators.</li> <li>• Study differences and commonalities between urban and rural settings, as well as inter- and intra-regional variations.</li> <li>• Undertake a comprehensive survey (large longitudinal, quantitative survey with a complementary qualitative study) to develop our knowledge base about Indigenous youth attitudes, motivations, aspirations, expectations and experiences of political and civic participation, using appropriate methodologies in collaboration with Aboriginal scholars.</li> </ul>
<b>Probing ICT: New Ways of Participating</b>	<p>How is technology changing political and civic relationships between young citizens and the state, and among youth?</p> <p>How is the media – old and new – contributing to the formation of political understanding and political identity and new forms of engagement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design a research project that includes a conceptual framework to guide new empirical research on how youth are using new information technologies and traditional media to gather information, get inspired, mobilize and engage.</li> <li>• This would include investigating how new spaces for interaction between people, such as text messages, Facebook, blogs, alternative news sites and Wikipedia, are evolving and influencing new conceptions of community, peer groups and citizenship. Determine how celebrities' well-publicized philanthropic works (followed online by millions of youth) are influencing youth's ideas about the respective roles of government, the private sector and the community.</li> <li>• Identify and document promising and best practices in youth-led ICT initiatives that contribute to civic literacy and support engagement.</li> </ul>
<b>Formal and Informal Participation</b>	Are new forms of non-traditional political and civic participation displacing traditional participation? Or do youth who engage in traditional forms of participation move back and forth between these worlds?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map the different pathways that lead youth into formal and/or informal, traditional and non-traditional civic and political participation in Canada and other western countries, and then identify the salient factors that inhibit and encourage full political participation.</li> </ul>

Theme	Question	Priorities
	<p>What are the linkages between civic engagement, traditional political engagement and non-traditional political engagement? Which behaviours are the drivers?</p> <p>Do the patterns of participation matter? Would some youth be more likely to engage in some form of political and civic participation if they had previous experience with more formal participation?</p>	
<p><b>Make use of both quantitative and qualitative methods</b></p>	<p>Are we now using the best combinations of methodological approaches to capture the changing nature of political attitudes and behaviours among youth?</p> <p>What changes in engagement patterns among today's youth can be attributed to life cycle and/or generational effects?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and conduct longitudinal surveys to undertake research on youth attitudes and behaviours in regard to voting, civic and political engagement or political literacy.</li> <li>• Undertake more qualitative in-depth studies to complement large-scale surveys. →Use open-ended questions and inductive research, in combination with other more quantitative and statistically representative approaches, to help us redefine the more problematic concepts and widen our understanding of new forms of engagement and mobilization.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Expanding Definitions and Clarifying Concepts</b></p>	<p>Do current political survey instruments adequately capture the ways in which youth conceptualize and discuss politics and political activity?</p> <p>Do we need to rethink and redesign questionnaires to capture new and alternative forms of engagement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake a systematic assessment of current political behaviour and attitude surveys to determine whether, and if so how, they should be modified to capture the broader discourse among youth about politics and how they engage.</li> </ul>

## Summary

We have yet to comprehensively map youth political and civic engagement in Canada. We have not adequately captured under-reported forms of youth participation, such as online participation, self-organized activity with a social purpose, sport and creative arts (as an expression of political voice), nor fully investigated new discourses for civic knowledge. This research series and other papers present compelling arguments to rethink and re-conceptualize research approaches for youth engagement, including how we define, frame, teach and discuss it in schools, the media, the community, and at home.

## 5. Translating Youth Engagement: Connecting Youth, Politics and Policy

*We see Canada as a dynamic place to live in, full of activism, participation and inclusion. We want the government not to be something untouchable, but rather a community in which we not only hear what everyone has to say, but we truly listen and care about the issues relevant to our people. We want citizens to know why they are paying taxes, to understand how the system works, and to have the chance to have their voices heard in decision-making.*

— Youth participant, CPRN National Dialogue and Summit on Engaging Young Canadians, 2005 (CPRN, 2006: 4)

Canadian society has experienced dramatic changes over the past 50 years, including a significant decline in youth participation in formal political activities, lower civic literacy and a rise in individualism. Explanations for these changes include life cycle and generational effects, with greater weight given to the latter. Research evidence, however, still falls short of providing adequate explanations for key questions about the nature and complexity of youth participation. Nonetheless, it does provide some pretty clear predictors. One of the best indicators of civic and political participation later in life is participation at an early age. Family and educational institutions continue to be very effective conduits for early childhood socialization into political participation.

The current research series has set the record straight: youth are not disconnected from politics; political institutions, practices and culture are disconnected from youth. Participation and politics are defined in ways that youth do not relate to; definitions of participation and the tools with which it is measured are too narrow to capture the complexity and nuance of why they engage or how they are doing it. Mainstream politics are out of sync with youth and their motivations to engage and do not respond to the challenges youth encounter in becoming more engaged.

Listening carefully to youth reveals that they are still ready to trust public institutions and are not really disconnected from the idea of politics – it is the current “partisan” politics that they are rejecting. We have to redirect public energy from making youth fit our traditional ways of doing politics to a more constructive and respectful process of co-creating the politics and civic (and civil) society that we want.

Societal institutions are failing to help youth connect the dots between their personal realities and everyday struggles, and politics, policy and active citizenship. Today’s youth feel the burden of having to fix past mistakes from previous generations, but they have not been given the proper tools and skills training to meet the challenge.

Given their heterogeneity, there can be no single best way to engage youth. There are, however, criteria for successful engagement (e.g. participatory methods, engage them on their own turf, focus on relevant issues), the most important of which is to engage youth respectfully as citizens.

They deserve no less than meaningful opportunities to define what is most important to them, by developing and applying their values, knowledge and skills as full participating citizens. Accepting youth as co-creators and partners is an essential part of our efforts to strengthen democracy.

However, it is important to also acknowledge that intergenerational dialogue is a two-way conversation: better listening and translation is needed on both sides of the generational divide. While greater onus must be placed on those holding political and societal power to learn and use new language, youth also need to learn to interpret and understand the political discourse, history and concepts underpinning democracy. Intergenerational dialogue will help us move from being “lost in translation” to creating shared language and approaches to encourage and support active citizenship for all.

## References

- Alfred, Taiaiake, Jackie Price, and Brock Pitawanakwat. 2007. *The Meaning of Political Participation for Indigenous Youth*. Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- Archer, K., and J. Wesley. 2006. *And I Don't Do Dishes Either! Disengagement from Civic and Personal Duty*. Prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, York University, Toronto, ON, June 1-3, 2006.
- Barnard, Robert, Denise Andrea Campbell, and Shelley Smith [with contributions from Don Embuldeniya]. 2003. *Citizen Re:Generation – Understanding Active Citizen Engagement among Canada's Information Age Generations*. D-Code.
- Borins, S., and D. Brown. 2007. "E-Consultation: Technology at the Interface between Civil Society and Government." In Borins, S., et al. *Digital State at the Leading Edge*. The Institute of Public Administration of Canada Series in Public Management and Governance. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Borins, S., K. Kernaghan, D. Brown, N. Bontis, Perri 6, and F. Thompson. 2007. *Digital State at the Leading Edge*. The Institute of Public Administration of Canada Series in Public Management and Governance. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Burgman, Tamsyn, and Tamara Cherry. 2007. "'Support the monks' via Facebook." *Toronto Star*, September 30. Retrieved from [www.thestar.com/article/261973](http://www.thestar.com/article/261973).
- CPRN [Canadian Policy Research Networks]. 2007. *Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation Workshop: Summary Report*. Ottawa: CPRN.
- CPRN [Canadian Policy Research Networks]. 2006. *Towards an Action Plan for Canada: Our Vision, Values and Actions*. Summary report of the CPRN National Dialogue and Summit on Engaging Young Canadians. Ottawa, ON. November 24-27, 2005. Ottawa: CPRN.
- CRIC [Centre for Research and Information on Canada]. 2003. *Youth and Leadership: A CRIC Study of the Values and Priorities of the Next Generation of Community Leaders in Ontario. Final Report*. Ottawa: Centre for Research and Information on Canada.
- Crick, B. 1998. *Educating for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools: Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship*. London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.
- Delli Carpini, M. X. 2000. "Gen.com: Youth, Civic Engagement, and the New Information Environment." *Political Communication* Vol. 17: 341-349.
- Ferguson, Ross. 2006. *Digital Dialogues Interim Report*. UK: Hansard Society.

- Gidengil, Elizabeth, et al. 2005. "Missing the Message: Young Adults and the Election Issue." *Electoral Insight* 7, No. 1.
- Gidengil, Elizabeth, et al. 2004a. *Citizens*. Canadian Democratic Audit Series. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Gidengil, Elizabeth, et al. 2004b. *Voters*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Gidengil, Elizabeth, et al. 2003. "Turned Off or Tuned Out? Youth Participation in Politics." *Electoral Insight* Vol. 5, No. 2: 9-14.
- Henn, Matt, Mark Weinstein, and Sarah Hodgkinson. 2007. "Social Capital and Political Participation: Understanding the Dynamics of Young People's Political Disengagement in Contemporary Britain." *Social Policy and Society* Vol. 6, No. 4: 467-479.
- Hooghe, Marc, and Dietlind Stolle. 2004. "Good Girls Go to the Polling Booth, Bad Boys Go Everywhere: Gender Differences in Anticipated Political Participation among American Fourteen-Year-Olds." *Women and Politics* Vol. 26, No. 3/4: 1-23.
- Howe, Paul. 2003. "Where Have All the Voters Gone?" *Inroads Journal* (Winter/Spring): 74-83.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Post Modernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Keown, Leslie-Anne. 2007. "Canadians and their non-voting political activity." *Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Trends*. No.11-008, 2007
- Llewellyn, Kristina R., et al. 2007. *The State and Potential of Civic Learning in Canada*. Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- MacKinnon, Mary Pat, and Judy Watling. 2006. *Connecting Young People, Policy and Active Citizenship*. Research Report, National Dialogue and Summit Engaging Young Canadians. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- MacLeod, Peter. 2005. *The Low Road to Democratic Reform: Constituency Offices, Public Service Provision and Citizen Engagement*. A report to the Democratic Reform Secretariat of the Privy Council Office of Canada. Ottawa: Privy Council Office. See [www.theplanningdesk.com](http://www.theplanningdesk.com).
- Mair, P., and Ivan Biezan. 2001. "Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies, 1980-2000." *Party Politics* Vol. 7, No. 1: 5-21.
- Milner, Henry. 2002. *Civic Literacy – How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work*. Hanover: University Press of New England.

- Nevitte, Neil. 1996. *The Decline of Deference*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Norris, Pippa. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Neill, Brenda. 2007. *Indifferent or Just Different? The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada*. Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- O'Neill, Brenda. 2001. "Generational Patterns in the Political Opinions and Behavior of Canadians: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff." *IRPP Policy Matters* Vol. 2, No. 5.
- Pammett, Jon, and Larry LeDuc. 2003. *Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-Voters*. Ottawa: Elections Canada.
- Parker, W. 2006. "'Advanced' Ideas about Democracy: Toward a Pluralist Conception of Citizen Education." *Teachers College Record* Vol. 98: 104-125.
- Pattie, C, P. Syed, and P.Whiteley. 2004. *Citizenship, Democracy and Participation in Contemporary Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Saunders, Eileen. Forthcoming. *Youth Engagement, Political Participation and Civic Education*. Paper prepared for the conference "Citizen Participation in the EU and Canada: Challenges and Change." Carleton University, Ottawa. May 24-25, 2007.
- Sears, Alan. 2006. *Neo-Liberalism, Globalization and Human Capital Learning: Reclaiming Education for Democratic Citizenship*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Sloam, James. 2007. "Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK." *Parliamentary Affairs* Vol. 60, No. 4: 548-567.
- Statistics Canada. 2007. *Family Portrait: Continuity and Change in Canadian Families and Households in 2006, 2006 Census*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Stolle, Dietlind, and Cesi Cruz. 2005. "Youth Civic Engagement in Canada: Implications for Public Policy." In *Social Capital in Action: Thematic Policy Studies*. Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative.
- Thibault, André, Patrice Albertus, and Julie Fortier. 2007. *Rendre compte et soutenir l'action bénévole des jeunes*. Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

- Turcotte, André. 2007. "What Do You Mean I Can't Have A Say?" *Young Canadians and their Government*. Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- Turnbull, Lori, and P. Aucoin. 2006. *Fostering Canadians' Role in Public Policy: A Strategy for Institutionalizing Public Involvement in Public Policy*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks. Retrieved from [www.cprn.org/documents/42670\\_en.pdf](http://www.cprn.org/documents/42670_en.pdf).
- Vromen, Ariadne. 2003. "'People Try to Put Us Down...': Participatory Citizenship of 'Generation X.'" *Australian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 38, No. 1: 79-99.
- Westheimer, Joel, and Sharon Cook. 2005. *Strengthening Canadian Democracy: Civic Literacy in Perspective*. Prepared for the Democratic Reform Secretariat, Privy Council Office of the Government of Canada. Ottawa: Democratic Dialogue.
- Westheimer, Joel, and Joseph Kahne. 2004. "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy." *American Educational Research Journal* Vol. 41, No. 2.
- Wolfinger, Raymond, and S. Rosenstone. 1980. *Who Votes?* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Young, Lisa, and William Cross. 2007. *A Group Apart: Young Party Members in Canada*. Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

## Appendix 1. Project Advisory Group

Rick	Anderson	Fireweed Democracy
Uttara	Chauhan	Elections Canada
Jennifer	Corriero	TakingITGlobal
Nevin and Spencer	Danielson Roberton	Government of Saskatchewan, Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation
Violetta	Ilkiw	Laidlaw Foundation
Peter	MacLeod	The Planning Desk
Tom	McIntosh	University of Regina
Andrew	Medd	Canada 25
Melinda	Morin	Aboriginal Youth for Saskatchewan
Deborah	Pellerin	Government of Nova Scotia, Department of Education
Daryl and Deborah	Rock Monette	Canadian Council on Learning

## **Appendix 2. Workshop Participants – March 7, 2007**

### **Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Democratic Participation / la participation des jeunes à la vie civique et démocratique**

#### **Workshop/Atelier**

**March 7, 2007 / 7 mars 2007**

#### **Participants/ participants et participantes**

Tommy Akululjuk  
Roya Atmar  
Josée Madéïa Charlebois  
Matt Clayton  
Josh Greenwald  
Victor Hilsden  
Wagma Isaqzoy  
Alexandra (Tori) Kellner  
Kayleigh McEwan  
Kate Primeau  
Ben Siversky  
Carey Teague  
Joslyn Trowbridge  
Kevin Wasacase

#### **Researchers/ les chercheurs**

Sharon Cook, University of Ottawa  
Bill Cross, Carleton University  
Kristina Llewellyn, University of Ottawa  
Brenda O'Neill, University of Calgary  
Jackie Price, Nunavut Sivuniksavut Training Program and University of Victoria  
Joel Westheimer, University of Ottawa

#### **Observers/ les observateurs**

##### **Project Advisory Group Members / Membres de la groupe consultatif**

Katherine Bruce, HSDC  
Uttara Chauhan, Elections Canada  
Nevin Danielson, Saskatchewan Culture, Youth and Recreation  
Eriel Deranger, TakingITGlobal  
Peter MacLeod, The Planning Desk  
Deborah Monette, Canadian Council on Learning / Le Conseil canadien sur l'apprentissage

**Other Observers / autres observateurs**

Alison Luz Molina, University of Ottawa

Ranilce Guimaraes, University of Ottawa/ University of Brasilia)

Sylvia Smith, Elizabeth W. Wood Alternative Program

**CPRN/RCRPP**

Beth Allan, Facilitator / Animatrice

Jennifer Fry, Director, Public Affairs / Directrice d'affaires publiques

Mary Pat Mackinnon, Director, Public Involvement / Directrice, réseau de la participation publique

Sonia Pitre, Researcher, Public Involvement / Chercheure

Judi Varga-Toth, Assistant Director, Family Network / Directrice adjointe

Judy Watling, Assistant Director, Public Involvement / Directrice adjointe

## **Appendix 3. Roundtable Participants – May 16, 2007**

**Beth Allan**

Beth Allan and Associates

**Michel Amar**

SPA Associates

**Marielle Bérubé**

Indian and Northern Affairs

**Cindy Blackstock**

First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada

**Larry Booi**

Canadian Council on Learning

**Uttara Chauhan**

Elections Canada

**David Chernushenko**

Green Party of Canada

**Samir Chhabra**

Canada 25

**Kathleen Childs**

Ontario Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform

**Debbie Cook**

Privy Council Office

**Bill Cross**

Carleton University

**Julie Dompierre**

Department of Canadian Heritage

**Jan Elliott**

Fielding Graduate University

**Leonore Evans**

CPRN Intern

**Pierre-Luc Gravel**

Table de concertation des Forums Jeunesses régionaux du Québec

**Allison Harell**

McGill University

**Alex Hay**

Adult High School, OCDSB

**Violetta Ilkiw**

Laidlaw Foundation

**Tori Kellner**

CPRN Youth Workshop Participant

**John Kelly**

Carleton University

**Kathy Kennedy**

Human Resources and Social Development Canada

**Nishad Khanna**

Students Commission

**Kristina Llewellyn**

University of Ottawa

**Roseline MacAngus**

Office of the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs & Western Economic Diversification

**Mary Pat MacKinnon**

CPRN

**Sharon Manson Singer**

CPRN

**Judith Maxwell**

CPRN

**Dan McDougall**

Privy Council Office

**Tom McIntosh**

University of Regina

**Peter McLeod**  
The Planning Desk

**Georgia Metcalfe**  
Nova Scotia Youth Advisory Committee

**Henry Milner**  
Université de Montréal

**Deborah Monette**  
Canadian Council on Learning

**Chi Nguyen**  
National Association of Women and the Law

**Brenda O'Neill**  
University of Calgary

**Caroline Pestieau**  
Caroline Pestieau & Associates

**Brock Pitawanakwat**  
First Nations University / University of Victoria

**Sonia Pitre**  
CPRN

**Jackie Price**  
Nunavut Sivuniksavut/University of Victoria

**Spencer Roberton**  
Government of Saskatchewan

**Christian Robitaille**  
WYC2008

**Amanda Sheedy**  
University of Toronto

**Suzanne Taschereau**  
Suzanne Taschereau et Associés

**André Turcotte**  
Carleton University

**Kevin Wasacase**  
CPRN Youth Workshop Participant

**Joel Westheimer**  
University of Ottawa

**Judy Watling**  
CPRN

**Sandra Zagon**  
Ascentum



Canadian Policy Research Networks – Réseaux canadiens de recherche en politiques publiques  
214 – 151 Slater Street, Ottawa, ON K1P 5H3  
☎ 613-567-7500 – 📠 613-567-7640 – 🌐 [www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org)