



# The Association of Municipalities of Ontario x Apathy is Boring: Engaging Youth in Local Democracy



April 2025

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# Message from the AMO President

In the lead up to the 2022 municipal elections, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) ran its We All Win campaign to encourage greater diversity on municipal councils. After the election, the AMO Board of Directors approved the Healthy Democracy Project to build from that campaign to encourage greater democratic participation in local government, improve the tone of political discourse, and improve the awareness of the important role of and responsibilities of local government.

In a healthy democracy, people turn out to vote, those with different backgrounds and perspectives are valued, and debate is respectful. However, in recent years, our public discourse has become dominated by anger and apathy rather than compassion and courage. Fewer people are voting and running for local offices. These trends are having an impact on youth involvement in their local democracies.

We know that if we want more young people to get involved and to vote in local elections, we need to give them a reason. Quite reasonably, young people need to believe that they are being heard, that we, their elected representatives, understand their priorities, and that we are committed to working on those issues and including young people in the process.

To further the work of the Healthy Democracy Project, AMO hosted a Healthy Democracy Forum on October 19 and 20, 2024. One of the subjects of focus at the Forum, was how to support locally elected officials to better engage with the youth in their communities. That session was led by Apathy is Boring, a national non-profit organization that is a leader in involving and engaging youth in the issues they are most passionate about.

A full room of 35 young leaders and representatives of youth-focused organizations tackled the issues and barriers impeding youth involvement. What is clear out of those conversations is there is much work to be done. But also, that there is great potential and interest to create positive momentum.

What is also clear, is that no individual organization has the mandate or capacity to do all that's needed to improve the conditions for youth involvement. AMO and its members are committed to engaging with the young people in our communities and we look forward to working with others in this sector, our partners, schools, and community organizations to create lasting, positive change.



**Robin Jones,**  
President, Association of Municipalities of Ontario



## Introduction

In October 2024, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) held its inaugural Healthy Democracy Forum. This two-day event included an array of subject matter experts, elected officials, academics, sector and organizational leaders among others. Day 1 of the event featured a youth-focused session lead by AMO partners, Apathy is Boring. The Youth Session was designed as an effort to build understanding and resources in an effort to bridge the gap between youth and municipal government through inclusive and participatory engagement. This session aimed to address the systemic barriers limiting youth civic participation and provide youth-friendly frameworks for effective engagement. By leveraging the 7 Principles of Youth Friendliness, the Forum sought to empower youth, prioritize inclusive practices, and establish mechanisms for sustained youth engagement in municipal governance. The insights and recommendations captured here are derived from interactive sessions, pre- and post-surveys, and participant-driven discussions.

## Why is this work important?

In the preparatory work we undertook ahead of the Forum's Youth Day, Apathy is Boring uncovered trends in Ontario municipal datasets received from Toronto Metropolitan University<sup>1</sup>. When weighted, age was broken into brackets, the following comparisons emerged:

1. **When it comes to feeling like their voice is heard in local government**, youth (and the entire sample) tend to land on the disagree – strongly disagree end of the scale more so than the other way.
2. **Youth are more likely than older age brackets** to indicate that they feel like local government and local politics are too complex to properly understand:



<sup>1</sup> 2022 Municipal Elections Data, Dr. Michael McGregor, Toronto Metropolitan University

## Strike while the iron is hot:

As a result of this data and some of the national data from Apathy is Boring's collaboration with Abacus Data (2022) (see below), right now is the best time to act and start implementing positive changes to municipal engagement strategies for and with youth. Youth contributing to research tell us that they a) find municipal government too complicated, b) perceive the impact of municipal government to be lower than provincial and federal tiers and c) their self reported knowledge of municipal government lags behind provincial and federal tiers. Municipalities have the power, resources, knowledge and interest to incorporate additional opportunities to increase youth understanding and knowledge of local government, the benefits of which will only serve to strengthen the municipal government and local community themselves.

### PERCEIVED IMPACT OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT LOWER THAN PROVINCIAL, FEDERAL

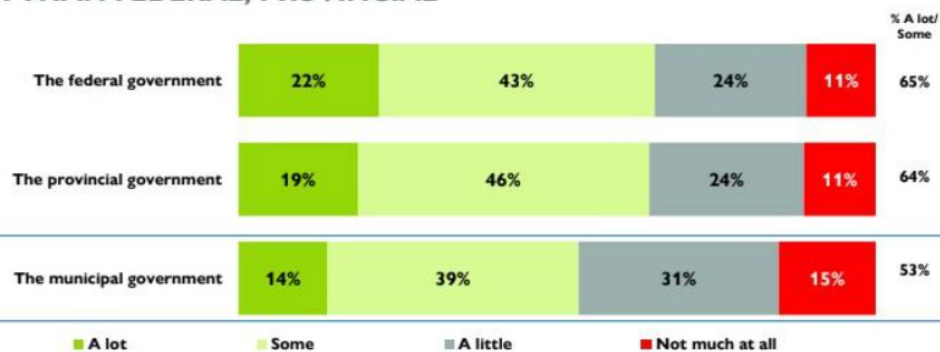


Few say municipal government has no impact on their lives however the degree of impact is lower compared to other levels of government. Perception of impact does play a role in whether or not an individual votes municipally, but it has a much stronger relationship with awareness (meaning, those who can name their municipal representatives), and whether or not someone is actively involved at the municipal level.

What kind of impact do each of the levels of government have on your life?

ABACUS DATA

### SELF-REPORTED KNOWLEDGE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IS MUCH LOWER THAN FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL



Perceptions of impact may be driven by knowledge levels. Young Canadians are much less knowledgeable about municipal governments. Unlike perceived impact, there is a strong relationship between education about municipal government and voting behaviour. There is also a strong relationship between knowledge and involvement.

# Methods

To gain a holistic understanding of youth engagement challenges and opportunities, the following methods were utilized:

1

## Pre-session survey

A pre-survey was administered to youth participants and municipal leaders to capture their initial perceptions and experiences of youth civic engagement. The survey identified existing knowledge gaps, perceived barriers, and baseline understanding of municipal governance structures. This data informed the workshop's content and ensured a tailored approach to addressing participant needs

2

## Interactive workshop structure

The workshop included several key components:

- **Municipal civics 101 session:** Provided foundational knowledge on municipal governance, roles, and decision-making processes to ensure all participants shared a baseline understanding.
- **Barrier identification and solutions workshops:** Participants were divided into groups to discuss barriers to youth engagement and collaboratively develop solutions using structured brainstorming and design-thinking tools.
- **The role of municipal governments workshop:** Guided discussions explored deeper systemic issues and pathways for integrating youth voices within municipal policies. Notes, participant quotes, and feedback were captured for analysis

3

## Post-session data collection

Participants engaged in a post-survey. Key themes were identified.



# Results and Analysis

We have chosen to align the major themes of the data we collected at the session with the 7 Principles of Youth Friendliness that Apathy is Boring uses to guide systemic change in organizational youth engagement strategies.

After compiling all of the raw data, we undertook a structured thematic analysis of the youth's sentiments and uncovered the following major themes:

## Youth Friendly Principles\*

*\*by order of frequency of appearance in our dataset*

1

### **When it comes to recruitment, do the work:**

Youth don't know about opportunities available to them. Expect to do a bit of lifting when making initial connections with youth, especially with diverse youth. Use resources and tools like social media, and prioritize developing partnerships that are youth-run, youth-led and youth friendly.

2

### **Create and communicate the "Sandbox" for innovation:**

Youth feel blindsided when they step into an opportunity. Set realistic expectations and constraints for their involvement. What types of resources are available? Is there upward mobility (if working)? What are the expectations? Transparency, trust, communication and respect are all paramount.

3

### **Incorporate feedback and be responsive to youth:**

Youth often feel their suggestions aren't heard and that feedback given is not constructive. Consider using or creating an evaluation and feedback process with involved youth. Make sure you check in as much as possible to keep connections strong, and use the feedback given to you by youth to iterate on your projects or even with job processes. Provide youth with clear, valid, and reasonable feedback about their work.



4

**Empower youth in decision making:**

Youth often feel that their voice isn't heard or doesn't matter when it comes to the "big stuff", or that their ideas are shut down without proper consideration. Provide youth with access and control and help them bring their ideas to life. Create spaces for them to develop and share their ideas and skills with the rest of the team, equally.

5

**Incorporate (culturally appropriate) mentorship opportunities for supplemental support:**

Youth do best when receiving mentorship support from other, older youth who they can see themselves in. Create opportunities for youth to learn and grow in your organization, especially through peer-to-peer and intergenerational mentorship. Provide opportunities for youth to become mentors as they transition into new skills and challenges.

6

**Prioritize anti-oppression training and tools:**

Youth often feel tokenized in the roles they're given (e.g., when sitting on a board or council), not just because of their age but because of compounded, marginalized identities. Youth engagement should center around the diverse lived experiences and barriers they face and be welcoming to new perspectives. Operate in a framework that creates safe, conscious, and open spaces. Work with experts to train your staff and continue learning. Have the proper tools and systems to support diverse youth.

## 7

## Reinforce the value of the skills, experience and power of young people:

Youth often feel they don't have the "right" things yet because they're young. They may not have a PhD or ten years of work experience, but this does not make their opinions invalid. Operate from the framing that lived experiences are just as valuable as formal education or formal training.

Sample data collected:

Step 1: Find a team of people who get ~~how~~ access to young people + spaces

Step 2: Get social media accounts active + up. ALSO connect to youth + organizations.

Step 3: Hold open events youth-centred Events + Outreach and education on current issues.

Step 4: Provide opportunities for youth to get involved with politics / municipal gov. (internships etc.)

Step 5: Follow-up with community / youth

Stage 1: Create a budget for youth engagement.

Education - explaining what's important to you about municipal govt  
- list of favourite educational youtube videos!  
- youth-oriented dissemination of reports

Engagement - classroom connections, have teachers nominate students, etc..  
- follow up, foster human connections, follow up!  
- recruit local community "heroes" / "icons" to help  
- design jam concept activities - hands-on ideation

Strategy - futureproofing policies / plans  
- make youth engagement a strategy's pillar  
- conceptualize youth as a real stakeholder group

→ always have minimum two youth/student reps! don't place all the onus on a single person

→ real connections through schools

1. have classrooms write you private letters - and reply if they sign

2. tell them about your mistakes!

3. have teachers nominate potential youth leaders in their classes

4. schedule ongoing connection - video call + 6m every month!

## Having an impact on youth engagement

Improving the relationship between young people and their municipal governments will require a complete public sector response. Through the discussions at the AMO Healthy Democracy Forum, there is a shared interest in having more young people voting in elections and being involved in local decision-making. For those goals to be realized, young people have told us a few things that need to be acted on:

1. Democratic institutions and actors need to listen to young people.
2. The needs of young people need to be prioritized.
3. Democratic institutions, education partners, and elected officials must do a better job of demonstrating that local government is relevant to them and plays a role in addressing the issues young people care about.

The ability to act on these issues goes beyond the capacity of any one actor. Having a lasting impact on youth engagement with local decision-making will require a concerted and coordinated effort by all involved, including local governments, their staff and elected officials, government associations, academic institutions, civil society organizations and community organizations.

The recommendations shared below will require collaboration and shared capacity. They must balance the urgent need to reach young people where they are with a long-term commitment to valuing and including them in democratic processes.

## Findings

Barriers to recruitment were among the most frequently mentioned challenges.

Participants highlighted systemic obstacles such as socioeconomic disparities, geographic barriers, and inaccessible communication channels. "Outreach needs to meet us where we're

at—if it doesn't, it's just a one-way street," a participant noted. Many youth expressed that traditional recruitment strategies often fail to reach underrepresented groups, particularly those from rural or marginalized communities.

- 1 School workshops / Visits \*
- 2 Online engagement (insta)
- 3 Partner with youth serving orgs.
- 4 Cafe engagements
- 5 talk to us!!
- 6 Be authentic, Not Just a person in a suit.
- 7 Support youth related motions
- 8 Plain language materials

## Recommendations

- **Solutions:** To overcome these barriers, targeted outreach strategies should be implemented, focusing on meeting youth where they are—whether online, at schools, or within community organizations. Financial incentives, stipends, and flexible engagement models can mitigate economic barriers. One participant emphasized, "We need platforms that are relevant to us—social media, school clubs, and community spaces." Partnering with local organizations can also ensure tailored outreach efforts that reflect the diverse needs of youth.

## Potential public sector solutions and innovations

- **Facilitate cross-sector collaborations:** Municipalities could connect with local schools, community organizations, and youth networks to expand their outreach reach. Local institutions (like AMO and others) can act as a convener, organizing training sessions and webinars on effective youth recruitment tailored to specific municipal needs.
- **Provide grants and resources:** Offer targeted funding opportunities or grants for municipalities or local organizations to support outreach programs, including transportation stipends for economically disadvantaged youth or resources for digital outreach initiatives.
- **Create a toolkit for inclusive recruitment:** Develop and disseminate a comprehensive toolkit that offers best practices, case studies, and strategies for municipalities to effectively engage diverse youth populations, including marginalized and rural communities.

## Opportunities for local municipal governments

Host youth-specific events: Organize community engagement fairs, youth expos, or networking events specifically targeting young people and showcasing opportunities to engage with local governance.

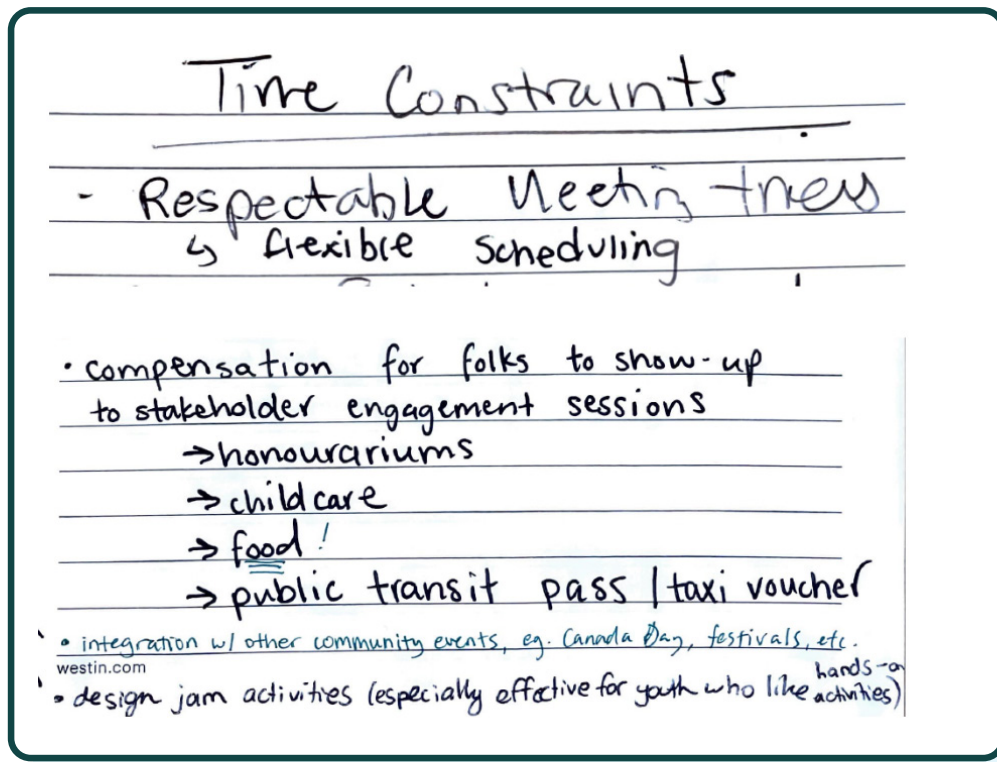
Use diverse communication channels: Utilize social media, online forums, community centres, schools, and cultural gatherings to reach youth where they are, adapting language and messaging for accessibility and relevance.

Offer flexible engagement opportunities: Provide virtual options, weekend or evening sessions, and low-barrier entry points for youth to get involved, making participation more accessible for those facing logistical or economic barriers.

## 2 Create and Communicate the “Sandbox” for Innovation

### Findings

Participants emphasized that unclear expectations and undefined roles often stifle creativity and limit their engagement potential. “It’s hard to innovate when we don’t know what’s possible or what’s allowed,” noted one participant. Ambiguity around the scope of youth participation can lead to frustration and disengagement.



## Recommendations:

**Solutions:** Clearly defining the scope, roles, and expectations for youth engagement initiatives is essential. Structured forums and innovation “labs” where youth can present and test their ideas provide a supportive environment for creativity. “We need spaces to try things out without fear of judgment,” said a participant. Transparent communication channels and regular feedback sessions help establish mutual trust and understanding.

### Potential public sector solutions and innovations

- **Develop structured innovation programs:** Organizations can initiate “youth innovation labs” where young people collaborate with municipal leaders on real-world projects, setting clear guidelines and expectations for their contributions.
- **Establish clear communication protocols:** Develop communication frameworks and templates that municipalities can use to clearly outline youth participants’ roles, expectations, and boundaries.
- **Support pilot projects:** Provide funding and technical support for municipalities to run pilot projects led by youth, focusing on innovative community solutions, and facilitate a platform for sharing success stories and lessons learned.

### Opportunities for local municipal governments

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities:** Before engaging youth in projects, municipalities should ensure that all participants understand their roles, decision-making power, and boundaries of their involvement through orientation sessions or written guides.
- **Encourage feedback loops in innovation:** Implement regular check-ins and feedback sessions with youth participants to ensure their ideas are recognized and refine project parameters based on their input.
- **Create a safe environment for experimentation:** Municipalities should establish spaces where youth can test new ideas without fear of failure, such as community innovation labs or “idea incubators.”
- **Be approachable:** Municipal elected officials should be mindful of using jargon and technical language when reaching out to youth, since this only widens the gap/divide and makes youth feel insecure in their limited knowledge base. When going into youth spaces, it’s also important to be less “corporate” to promote comfortability (i.e., not wearing a suit, not giving formal lectures, and instead creating space for natural conversations in a non-pressured environment).



## 3

## Incorporate Feedback and Be Responsive to Youth

### Findings

The lack of responsiveness to youth feedback emerged as a significant barrier. Many participants felt “tokenized” whenever their input was collected but not acted upon. “We don’t want just to speak—we want to be heard and see change happen,” noted a participant. This disconnect between feedback and action diminishes trust and engagement and leaves youth demotivated to continue their involvement or seek other involvement opportunities.

- destigmatizing the need for prior experience & perfectionism & humanize politicians → go out in community, high schools, etc.
- encourage politicians to present themselves authentically & share prior experiences with risk.

this will make politics feel more relatable. often our politicians don't want to show fault.

- Emphasize “politicians aren’t perfect”

### Recommendations

- **Solutions:** Establishing regular feedback loops, publicizing updates on actions taken based on youth input, and including youth in decision-making processes are essential steps. “If you ask us for input, follow through—it builds trust,” remarked a participant. Municipalities should engage youth as partners in the implementation of their recommendations.



## Potential public sector solutions and innovations

- **Develop feedback and accountability frameworks:** Provide templates and examples of effective feedback loops that municipalities can tailor to ensure youth input leads to actionable change.
- **Facilitate training on responsive governance:** Offer workshops for municipal staff and local leaders on listening to youth voices, integrating feedback, and demonstrating responsiveness through transparent action plans and follow-ups.
- **Showcase exemplary practices:** Highlight municipalities that effectively integrate youth feedback into policies and programs, creating a model for others to replicate and adapt.

## Opportunities for local municipal governments

- **Create dedicated feedback channels:** Establish online portals, youth advisory committees, or regular town halls specifically for gathering youth feedback on municipal policies and programs.
- **Act transparently:** Communicate back to youth on the status of their input and how it is being implemented, including public updates, reports, or follow-up meetings.
- **Integrate youth in decision-making:** Include youth representatives on decision-making committees to ensure their perspectives are integrated from the outset and that they have an active role in shaping outcomes.

### Findings

A lack of meaningful decision-making opportunities for youth was identified as a significant barrier. “Giving us real power—not just symbolic seats—makes the difference,” stated a participant. Many youth highlighted the need for continuing roles that go beyond token representation, allowing them to influence policies and programs that affect their lives.

### Recommendations

- **Solutions:** Empowering youth through advisory councils, participatory planning sessions, and direct input into municipal policy decisions fosters genuine engagement. “Let us take charge and make decisions alongside you,” suggested a participant. Regular town halls and feedback forums can provide avenues for youth to engage meaningfully.

### Potential public sector solutions and innovations

- **Promote youth leadership opportunities:** Encourage municipalities to create formal positions for youth on decision-making bodies, such as councils, committees, or boards, and provide guidelines for their effective integration.
- **Offer leadership training programs:** Develop training modules focused on leadership skills, policy analysis, and public speaking, empowering youth to effectively contribute to municipal governance.
- **Facilitate Networking Opportunities:** Organize conferences and forums where youth leaders can engage with municipal officials, learn from each other, and advocate for youth-friendly policies.

### Opportunities for local municipal governments

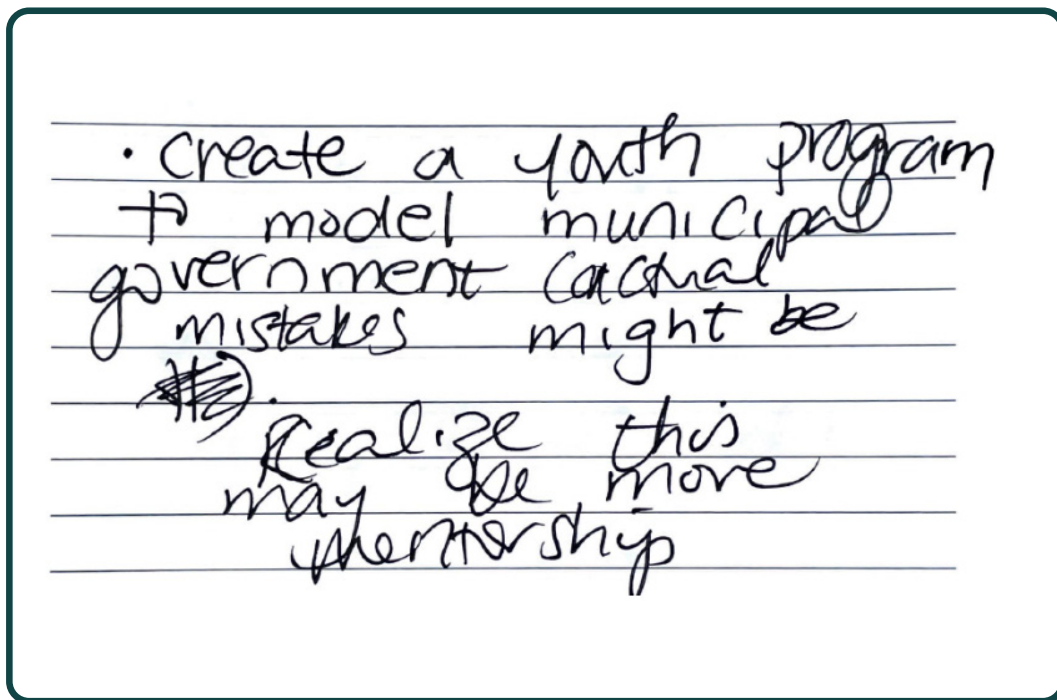
- **Establish youth councils:** Create youth councils that are consulted on municipal policies, ensuring their voices are meaningfully incorporated into decision-making processes. Follow up with youth on the council and provide ways to show them how their ideas have been included in decisions made.
- **Co-design policies with youth:** Engage youth in collaborative policy design processes, where they have equal say alongside municipal officials in developing initiatives that impact their lives.

## 5

## Incorporate (Culturally Appropriate) Mentorship Opportunities for Supplemental Support

### Findings

Participants valued mentorship but cited a lack of culturally appropriate and accessible opportunities as a barrier. “Mentorship has to reflect who we are—our experiences and identities matter,” one participant emphasized. Peer and adult mentorship can bridge gaps in knowledge and confidence but must be inclusive and responsive to diverse youth experiences.



### Recommendations

- **Solutions:** Establishing structured mentorship programs that connect youth with experienced leaders, creating peer-to-peer mentorship networks, and ensuring cultural responsiveness in mentorship offerings are essential. “We need mentors who understand us and our communities,” noted a participant. Providing mentorship in various formats—virtual, in-person, and peer-led—can increase accessibility.
- **Offer mentorship from municipal leaders:** Pair youth participants with elected officials or municipal staff for guidance, ensuring they have the tools and knowledge to influence decisions effectively.

## Potential public sector solutions and innovations

- **Develop a mentorship framework:** Create a standardized framework for municipalities to implement mentorship programs, emphasizing cultural responsiveness and tailored support for marginalized youth.
- **Connect municipalities with mentorship organizations:** Facilitate partnerships between municipalities and organizations specializing in youth mentorship, ensuring diverse and inclusive mentor matches.
- **Provide resources for training mentors:** Offer workshops and training materials to prepare mentors to effectively support youth, including training on cultural competence and active listening.

## Opportunities for local municipal governments

- **Implement peer-led mentorship programs:** Foster mentorship opportunities where experienced youth can guide newer participants, building a supportive community within municipal initiatives.
- **Offer flexible mentorship models:** Provide virtual, in-person, and hybrid mentorship options to accommodate diverse schedules and needs.
- **Ensure cultural relevance:** Tailor mentorship programs to reflect the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities of youth participants, creating an inclusive and supportive environment.

## 6

## Prioritize Anti-Oppression Training and Tools

### Findings

The lack of anti-oppression training and inclusive practices was highlighted as a barrier to meaningful youth engagement. “If we don’t feel safe or valued, we won’t show up,” shared a participant. Addressing systemic biases and promoting equity within engagement spaces is essential for fostering inclusive participation.

### Recommendations

- **Solutions:** Implementing youth-focused anti-oppression and intergenerational workplace training for municipal staff, collaborating with equity-focused organizations, and regularly evaluating practices to ensure inclusivity are key. “Train leaders to understand our realities,” emphasized a participant. Creating safe spaces and culturally competent engagement processes can enhance youth participation.

### Potential public sector solutions and innovations

- **Develop comprehensive training modules:** Create anti-oppression training modules tailored to municipal contexts, focusing on equity, diversity, and inclusion, and make them accessible to all municipalities and their local partners and agencies.
- **Facilitate partnerships with equity organizations:** Connect municipalities with organizations specializing in anti-oppression work to co-create training and engagement initiatives.
- **Monitor and evaluate progress:** Establish benchmarks and tools for municipalities to assess the impact of their anti-oppression efforts and provide feedback for continuous improvement.

### Opportunities for local municipal governments

- **Provide training for staff and officials:** Require anti-oppression training for all municipal employees and elected officials to create inclusive environments for youth engagement.
- **Create safe spaces for youth engagement:** Ensure municipal programs and events are free from discrimination and actively promote inclusion, with protocols for addressing incidents of bias or exclusion.
- **Collaborate with community groups:** Partner with local equity-focused organizations to co-develop and co-facilitate anti-oppression initiatives tailored to the community’s needs.

## Reinforce the Value of the Skills, Experience, and Power of Young People

### Findings

Participants expressed frustration with being undervalued and dismissed based on their age. “Our experiences and skills matter—acknowledge that,” one participant asserted. Valuing youth contributions and recognizing their unique skills and perspectives are crucial for building mutual trust.

### Recommendations

- **Solutions:** Municipalities should highlight youth successes, create platforms for showcasing youth-led projects, and offer resources to support skill-building and leadership development. “We want to see our work valued and respected,” a participant shared. Recognition programs, skill-building workshops, and public acknowledgment of youth contributions can foster a sense of pride and purpose.

### Potential public sector solutions and innovations

- **Publicize youth contributions:** Promote success stories of youth-led initiatives across municipal networks, recognizing their impact through awards, articles, and conferences.
- **Provide skills training and development:** Develop and deliver workshops focused on skill-building, project management, and leadership tailored for young people engaging in municipal initiatives.
- **Create a youth recognition platform:** Establish a platform to formally recognize and celebrate youth contributions, offering awards, scholarships, or public acknowledgment ceremonies.

### Opportunities for local municipal government

- **Showcase youth achievements publicly:** Host events, exhibits, or showcases highlighting youth contributions to municipal initiatives, celebrating their impact and fostering community pride.
- **Invest in youth-led projects:** Provide funding, resources, and support for youth-driven projects, ensuring they have the tools to make a lasting impact.
- **Offer ongoing skill development:** Organize workshops, mentorship programs, and networking opportunities to further enhance the skills and confidence of youth leaders engaged in municipal governance

## Additional Themes Identified from the Healthy Democracy Forum

### 1. Civics Education

#### Findings

The need for increased civics education emerged as a key theme among participants. Many youth indicated a lack of understanding of municipal government roles, processes, and the impact of civic engagement on their communities. "It's hard to care about what we don't know," shared one participant. The lack of accessible civics education contributes to disengagement and makes it difficult for youth to see themselves as active community participants.

#### Recommendations

- **Solutions:** Develop and integrate comprehensive civics education programs that focus on municipal governance and the practical impact of civic engagement. "Workshops, school visits, and digital resources would help us understand how local politics works," suggested a participant. Tailoring educational content to be engaging, interactive, and relevant to youth needs can foster greater interest and participation.

#### Potential public sector solutions and innovations:

- **Facilitate curriculum development:** Work with educators, municipalities, and youth organizations to create engaging civics education curricula that reflect local governance contexts.
- **Support outreach programs:** Launch province-wide initiatives such as civics education campaigns, online learning platforms, and in-person workshops tailored to youth audiences.
- **Encourage partnerships:** Collaborate with schools, community organizations, and civic groups to embed civics education into school curricula and community programs.

#### Opportunities for local municipal governments:

- **Host civics education events:** Organize open houses, mock council meetings, and participatory workshops to demonstrate the inner workings of municipal governance
- **Engage youth directly:** Work with local schools to provide opportunities for students to learn about and engage with municipal leaders, through programs such as student government days and internships.



## 2. Opportunities in Government

### Findings

Participants identified a lack of clear pathways and opportunities to engage in government roles as a significant barrier to participation. “We want to get involved, but we don’t know where to start,” noted one youth. The absence of accessible opportunities for youth to enter government spaces or serve in leadership positions limits their ability to contribute meaningfully.

### Recommendations

- **Solutions:** Establish and publicize entry points for youth to engage in government roles, including internships, fellowships, youth advisory councils, and volunteer opportunities. “Create roles where our input is valued and impactful,” said a participant. Ensure these roles provide tangible pathways for career growth and skill development.

### Potential public sector solutions and innovations:

- **Develop youth fellowships and internships:** Create and fund programs that place youth in meaningful roles within municipal government offices, providing experience, training, and networking opportunities.
- **Promote youth involvement models:** Share examples of successful youth engagement in government with member municipalities, showcasing case studies and replicable programs.
- **Facilitate access to opportunities:** Maintain an online portal with up-to-date information on available youth roles and opportunities across Ontario’s municipalities.

### Opportunities for local municipal governments:

- **Offer internship and fellowship programs:** Provide youth with entry-level roles, internships, and job shadowing opportunities within local government departments.
- **Create youth advisory positions:** Appoint youth representatives to municipal boards and committees to ensure their voices are heard in key decision-making processes.
- **Mentor and guide youth:** Establish mentorship programs within municipal structures, connecting youth with experienced leaders and professionals.

### 3. Accessibility Factors and Solutions

#### Findings

Accessibility emerged as a significant barrier, with factors such as money, time, and knowledge limiting youth engagement. “Being involved costs time and money that some of us just don’t have,” one participant stated. Economic challenges, lack of flexible scheduling, and limited access to information disproportionately impact youth from marginalized backgrounds.

#### Recommendations

- **Solutions:** Implement policies and programs that reduce economic, time, and knowledge-based barriers to youth participation. This includes offering stipends, creating flexible participation options, and ensuring youth have access to relevant information. “Make it easier for everyone to get involved, no matter their situation,” suggested a participant.

#### Subcategories

##### Money

- **Solutions:** Provide stipends, travel reimbursements, and free access to events and programs to remove economic barriers. “We need support to be here—transportation and food costs can’t be a barrier,” noted a participant.

#### Potential public sector solutions and innovations:

- **Offer grants and subsidies:** Provide funding to municipalities to cover youth expenses related to civic engagement.
- **Advocate for financial accessibility:** Promote policies that ensure economic barriers do not prevent youth engagement.

#### Opportunities for local municipal governments:

- **Provide financial support:** Offer stipends, reimbursements, and free access to engagement events.
- **Budget for youth inclusion:** Allocate municipal resources specifically to reduce financial barriers for youth.

##### Time

- **Solutions:** Design flexible engagement opportunities that accommodate diverse schedules, such as virtual participation options, evening meetings, and asynchronous activities. “I can’t be there if it conflicts with school or work,” shared a participant.

### Potential public sector solutions and innovations:

- **Promote flexibility standards:** Encourage municipalities to adopt flexible scheduling practices for youth engagement.
- **Support virtual engagement:** Provide tools and resources to municipalities for hosting virtual and hybrid engagement sessions.

### Opportunities for local municipal governments:

- **Adopt flexible scheduling:** Offer evening, weekend, and remote participation options to accommodate youth availability.
- **Incorporate asynchronous activities:** Develop engagement opportunities that do not require live participation, such as online forums and recorded sessions.

## Knowledge

- **Solutions:** Increase access to information about municipal governance, opportunities for youth participation, and pathways to civic involvement. “We don’t know what’s out there—we need more information,” said a participant.

### Potential public sector solutions and innovations:

- **Centralize information resources:** Create and maintain a comprehensive online portal with information on youth engagement opportunities and municipal governance.
- **Host informational campaigns:** Run province-wide campaigns to inform youth about civic engagement opportunities.

### Opportunities for local municipal governments:

- **Enhance communication channels:** Use social media, school partnerships, and community outreach to disseminate information about local opportunities.
- **Offer educational workshops:** Provide regular workshops and sessions on municipal governance and how youth can get involved

## Conclusion

The AMO Healthy Democracy Forum Youth Session provided critical insights into the barriers and opportunities for youth engagement in municipal governance. By aligning participant feedback with the 7 Principles of Youth Friendliness, this report offers actionable strategies for creating inclusive, responsive, and empowering environments for youth.

The feedback and findings from this important session provide a valuable opportunity for AMO, its members, and all collaborators on youth engagement to build on the proposed solutions and recommendations. AMO thanks Apathy is Boring for leading these important discussions. Within its role and focus AMO will continue its commitment and efforts towards greater youth engagement and leadership in municipal governance.

# Civic Literacy Tools & Resources

## [Apathy is Boring Resources](#)

Apathy is Boring has been doing civic engagement and education work since 2004 for youth ages 18-34. They are proud to share their resources with you and your youth: from civics 101 to the Democracy Dictionary to more specific studies, you can find different civic literacy tools on their website.

## [Apathy is Boring Youth Friendly Resources](#)

Apathy is Boring provides additional consulting tools and resources through its Youth Friendly program. Whether it's creating a new project or initiative, or trying to figure out how to get more youth engaged, they are equipped and ready to help you succeed.

## [AMO's Municipal Rep Day resources](#)

AMO's Municipal Rep Day is a program that aims to support locally elected officials to help elementary and secondary school students understand the important role local government plays in addressing the most pressing issues for Ontario's youth. The program offers a set of resources that helps connect municipally elected officials with students to help ignite interest in local government with future voters and community leaders.

## [AMO's Municipal 101](#)

AMO has developed Municipal 101 as a source of key information for students, elected officials, sector professionals, and more, to learn how to improve engagement between local governments and their communities. The municipal level of government is the easiest to access for residents, so it's the best way to influence social change.

## [AMO's Democratic Engagement Solutions Bank](#)

The Democratic Engagement Solutions Bank is a catalogue of resources designed to help communities in Ontario find practical ways to improve democratic and political participation. In this catalogue, you'll find a collection of practical solutions, tools, resources, and approaches to help make your local democracy work better.



Association of  
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