

A Framework for Action

APM-REP-00611-0006

July 2014

National Youth Council
Assembly of First Nations
First Nations Youth Engagement Framework

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A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

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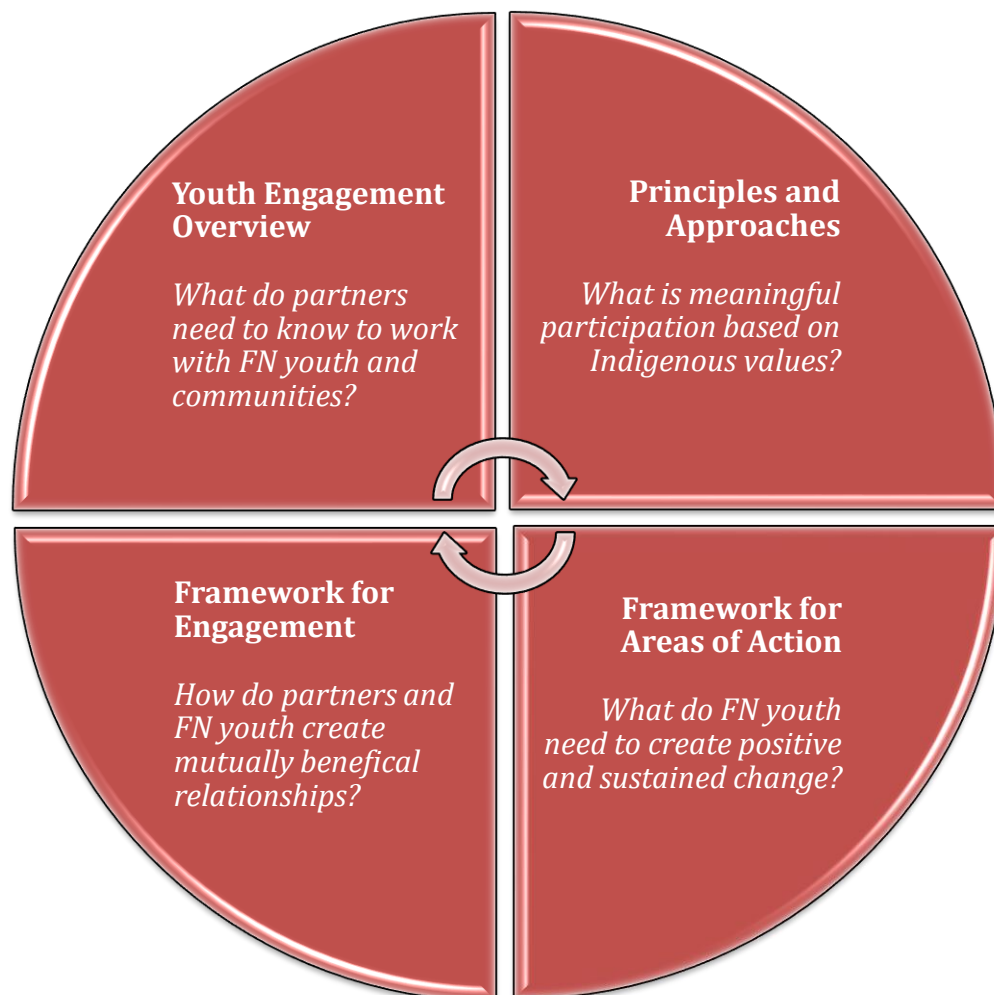
INTRODUCTION

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Youth Council developed this youth engagement framework as a tool for potential government, community, non-profit organizations, and business partners who are interested in engaging First Nations youth in an ethical, meaningful and innovative manner.

The AFN National Youth Council (NYC) is the national representative body for First Nations youth in Canada. The NYC acts as an advocate for youth issues at the national level; advises the Assembly of First Nations on how youth feel on various issues such as language, suicide prevention, non-traditional tobacco usage, and AFN renewal, and; promotes and creates opportunities for youth at the regional level.

The purpose of this framework is to be a guide to engaging First Nations (FN) youth.

The framework will provide:



OVERVIEW

This framework is a tool that the NYC can use to engage current and potential partners. The NYC recognizes the need to help partners understand how to work respectfully with First Nations youth and their organizations and communities. Partners can be government departments, non-profit organizations (NGOs), First Nations governments, small businesses or large corporations. This tool is critical to ensuring engagement of First Nations young people in order to facilitate the successful development of projects, programs, services and strategic activities.

Previously, the NYC developed an Action Plan from the 3rd National First Nations Youth Summit “Rebuilding Our Nations – National Unity, Voices from the Community” held October 30 - November 1, 2007 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The subsequent plan was released in 2008 and built on the NYC’s identified priorities of social, cultural, political and economic areas of action with an overall goal to support reconnection and healing in a First Nations context.

Building on the outcomes from the 2007 gathering, this framework adds the priorities identified by First Nations youth at the recent 4th National First Nations Youth Summit that took place in November 2013 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Over 500 youth from the AFN’s 10 regions participated at the youth summit. A major objective of this summit was to produce a tool that would engage partners to help to address issues and priorities identified by the First Nations youth.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Current and potential partners need to be aware of the impact of historical and contextual factors in order to best understand the path into the future. First Nations young people have always had a respected central role in their families and communities. In many Indigenous communities, youth had an equal voice in their Nation’s social, justice, and governance systems. Over time, that role has been diminished through factors such as colonization, the doctrine of discovery, treaty making and breaking, residential schools, child welfare, racism, and sexism. These contextual factors have built upon each other over time and interplay within the contemporary lives of First Nations youth who live with the consequences every day.

So often the problem facing First Nations youth have been reported and emphasized, but there is also hope in this generation of young leaders. They are engaged, educated and motivated and have been working in their communities to make them better places. They do not lack for ideas or motivation, but often, lack the support and resources to enact these ideas.

Potential partners should be knowledgeable about the First Nations young people and the communities with whom they are working. For many First Nations youth and communities, one of the essential overall goals is to reclaim the original intentions of the treaty relationship between First Nations and Canadians, respecting the inherent rights recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982* and outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, the projects they undertake often focus on restoring Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Partners that understand the historical contexts for First Nations youth are better equipped to help build roads into the future.

HOW TO USE THIS FRAMEWORK

This framework is intended to be a guide to engaging First Nations youth. Why and how to engage young people will change depending on the type of institution and nature of the project. The following are some areas of engagement to consider.

First Nations Leadership and Community	Community Governance
	Strategic Planning
	Education on Inherent Rights
	Culture and Language Teachings
Government	Legislation
	Treaty Relationships
	Fiduciary Responsibilities
	Programs and Services
Private Sector	Corporate Social Responsibility
	Respectful Workforce
	Cultural Education for Companies
	Opportunities for First Nations Youth beyond Entry-Level
Non Profit Organizations	Culturally Appropriate Services
	Projects and Programming
	Organizational Governance
	Employment Recruitment

Partners should consider these ideas, and also consider other areas based on their partnerships with First Nations youth representatives and organizations. The types and extent of youth engagement will vary, but youth engagement should occur at all levels from broad governance to day-to-day activities of their partners. All partnerships should be mutually beneficial to both the partner and for the youth. Finally, it's important that all partners engage in culturally-appropriate approaches when dealing with First Nations youth.

Youth have fresh ideas and have just as much to add to an institution, as they have to gain. Partners should look at First Nations youth engagement as an opportunity to learn and to build trust. To foster the relationships, partners must be prepared to provide the resources to develop necessary engagement tools for sustained relationships.

WHAT IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

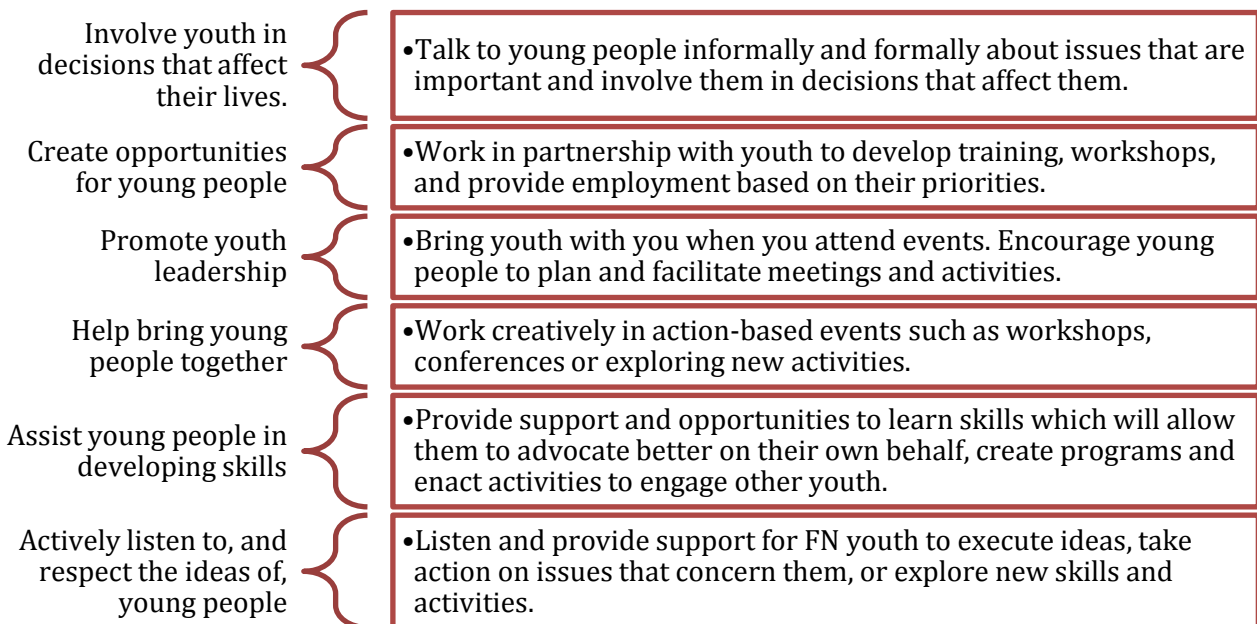
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The Centre of Excellence on Youth Engagement defines youth engagement as:

“Youth engagement is the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself.”

The definition of “youth” varies depending on the organization, the activities and the young people themselves. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. Some organizations identify youth as 18-24 years of age and go as young as 12 and up to age 30. Some international mechanisms go as high as 35 years. The best approach is to review the needs of the project and discuss the matter with young people themselves to outline an appropriate age range for the project or initiative.

Meaningful participation also varies depending on the organization, the activities and the young people who are engaged. Here are some examples of what youth engagement could look like. Partners should look to include these forms of youth engagement into the broad areas outlined in the previous page.



Centre of Excellence in Youth Engagement

INDIGENOUS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

There is a difference between engaging youth and engaging Indigenous youth. While Indigenous youth engagement includes the concepts of youth engagement, it is also broadened to include the values and traditions of the young person's community and incorporates historical contexts.

First Nations youth engagement could be described as:

Meaningful youth engagement of Indigenous young people is contextual based on the communities to which they belong and is rooted in Indigenous principles of inclusion.

In many traditional First Nations societies, all members of the community had a voice and deserved to be treated equally. Leadership was not just restricted to the elected or appointed members of the community. Instead, leadership was viewed as a service to the community and was built from the ground up and not from the top down.

Cultural Leadership

First Nations young people can show leadership in a number of ways that might not be recognized or prevalent in mainstream society. Cultural leadership is a unique First Nations leadership attribute. Young people can show their cultural leadership by inheriting a sacred item, participating in coming of age rites of passage or other ceremonies, and maintain intergenerational connections by working with elders. Cultural leadership also influences the way that First Nations youth see the world.

First Nations youth leaders often carry their culture with them and many describe it as walking in two worlds. Many First Nations youth are still seeking out their culture(s) and are working to restore their languages, traditions, cultures and ceremonies within a mainstream society that often disregards their cultures and traditions as primitive. As one NYC member puts it, "We've always been a circle trying to fit into a square".



FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

VISION

In developing this framework, the NYC articulated the following vision:

Our vision is to encourage and guide Governments, Businesses, Non-Governmental Organizations and First Nations Governments to respectfully engage First Nation youth using both traditional Indigenous values and contemporary tools.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The AFN Youth Council's goal is to improve the quality of life for First Nations by building trust and developing mutually beneficial partnerships that are subsistent at all levels of engagement.

These broad goals provide a guideline to be interpreted between partners and First Nations youth. Similarly, partners and First Nations youth will also develop objectives together that will meet the needs and develop and respect roles.

Broad Goals

Accessibility

- Ensuring First Nations youth know about and are able to apply for opportunities.

Information Sharing

- Sharing documents, links, between First Nations youth and partners to increase knowledge.

Resources

- Identifying, seeking and securing financial and other resources to respectfully engage First Nations youth.

Support

- Providing leadership support and space, time and staff to facilitate the participation of First Nations youth.

Maintaining Interest

- Communicating with First Nations youth to ensure that needs, interests and expectations are being met throughout the partnership.

Building Local support

- Encouraging regional and local affiliates and departments to follow the leadership example and provide opportunities at all levels of engagement.

Leadership Development

Developing skill-building and leadership development opportunities for First Nations youth on an ongoing basis.

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS YOUTH

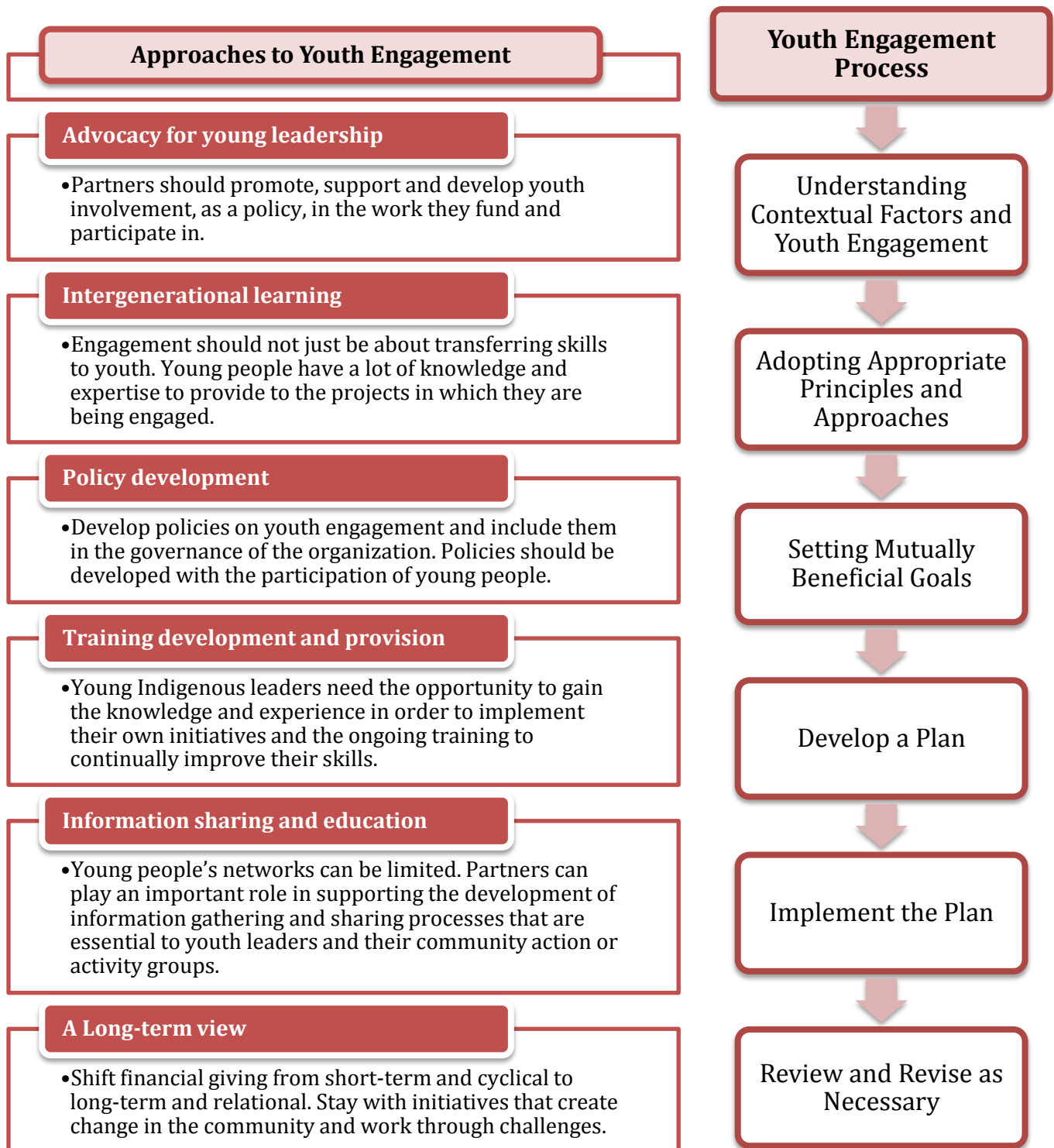
Indigenous youth, communities and organizations will have their own ideas of what constitutes meaningful youth engagement. However, there are a number of principles that can provide a starting point.

- Youth engagement is an attitude
 - Youth engagement is an attitude of having respect for and including young people in decisions that affect their lives.
- Contributions must match the needs
 - The contributions of young people must match their own interests, and their participation must also meet the needs of the organization that is engaging them (in other words, no tokenism).
- One cannot represent the many
 - Equitable youth engagement ensures that there are many opportunities for many youth to engage and does not rely on one person to represent the diverse voices of their peers.
- Debate as a learning tool
 - Learning is a two-way street. Indigenous young people are experts in their own lives and experiences. Using debate as a learning tool is about engaging in a conversation and intergenerational learning.
- Dignity and safety
 - Young people can be vulnerable, so care must be taken to prepare them for their roles and ensure they are coping with any responsibilities assigned.
- Avoid false or unrealistic expectations
 - Consideration must be given to the age, experiences, and education levels of the young people who are being engaged and the responsibilities and time commitment required.
- Balance and accessibility
 - Adult-allies need to be prepared to take measures to support youth in reaching an optimal level of participation.
- Understanding and integrating cultural identity
 - Know the young people and the communities that you are working with and respect cultural protocols.
- Increasing youth engagement and fostering youth empowerment
 - Utilize resources and draw more support from networks to increase and foster youth participation.

**Note: These principles were adopted from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, The University of Western Ontario and Jocelyn Formsma. Resources listed in the Articles Section.*

APPROACHES

Current and potential partners will develop unique approaches that meet the needs of their organization and First Nations youth partners. These approaches and process are provided as a starting point for discussion and deliberation.



FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The AFN Youth Council developed 8 themes to help focus advocacy and action.

Those 8 areas are:

Education

- Adequate Funding
- Community-Based Curriculum
- Distance Learning
- More Scholarships Bursaries
- Lifelong Learning Outside Academic Institutions

Economic Development

- Increase Skills Training And Entrepreneurship
- Knowledge About Business
- Mentorship
- Financial And Literacy Counselling
- Access To Credit

Rights-Based Recognition

- Meaningful Consultation
- Rights-Based Recognition
- Stewardship of Lands and Resources
- Inherent Pre-Confederation Treaties, Modern Day Treaties and Numbered Treaties

Health And Social

- Mental, Physical, Emotional And Spiritual Health (Including Tele-Health)
- Provision Of Shelters And Housing
- Child Care And Child Welfare Improvements
- Income Assistance
- Addictions Services And Treatment Centres
- Gender Identities And Healthy Sexuality
- Food Security And Sovereignty
- Human Resources, Training And Technology

Justice And Access To Justice

- Upholding Traditional Laws And Indigenous Legal Mechanisms
- Develop More Indigenous Lawyers
- Supporting Restorative Justice
- Customary Care and Adoption
- Healing Lodges
- Anti-Violence And Missing Murdered Indigenous Women
- Address Over-Incarceration And Prisons
- Homelessness

Supporting Community-Based Leadership

- Community-Based Youth Leadership
- Role-Models and Mentorship
- Youth Councils and Youth Gatherings
- First Nation Creating Community Infrastructure and Youth Seats On Chief And Council
- Access to Participation with Political Organizations
- Toolkits, Internship and Fellowships

Environment

- Proper And Effective Reclamation And Remediation
- Responsible Resource Development
- Implementing Traditional Knowledge
- Addressing Climate Change and Protecting Mother Earth, Water, Land, Air, Animals and Fish
- Access To Lands

Culture And Language

- Culturally-Appropriate Sentencing
- Cultural Knowledge, Oral Teachings and Language Preservation and Revitalization
- Traditional Medicine
- Bridging Generational Gaps To Promote Cultural Learning
- Cultural Eco-Tourism
- Teaching Languages In Mainstream Schools

REFERENCES

The following documents, actions plans and organizations were referred to in the development of this youth engagement framework. For more information, please refer to the citations and organizations.

ARTICLES

- Alderman, J., Balla, S., Blackstock, C., & Khanna, N. (2006). Guidelines for the ethical engagement of young people. Ottawa, ON: First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada.
- Crooks, C.V., Chiodo, D., Thomas, D., Burns, S., & Camillo, C. (2010). Engaging and empowering Aboriginal youth: A toolkit for service providers, 2nd edition. Bloomington, IN: Trafford Press. <https://youthrelationships.org/engaging-aboriginal-youth-toolkit>
- Formsma J., "Indigenous Youth Voices and the Role of Philanthropy." *The Philanthropist*, North America, 25, apr. 2013.
- Formsma, J. W. (2008). The convention on the rights of the child and indigenous youth. In Collins, T., et al. Rights of the child: Proceedings of the international conference (pp. 469-475). Ottawa, ON: Wilson and LaFleurItee.

YOUTH ACTION PLANS

- AFN Youth Action Plan (2008), Assembly of First Nations, Ottawa, ON
- Feathers of Hope (2014), Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, Ontario
- Chiefs of Ontario Youth Action Plan (2013), Chiefs of Ontario, Toronto, ON
- Atlantic First Nations Child and Youth Strategic Plan, Child and Youth Health Advisory Committee of the Mi'kmaq Maliseet Atlantic Health Board

YOUTH SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

- Assembly of First Nations Youth Council - <http://www.afnyouth.ca/>
- Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement - http://www.tgmag.ca/aorg/productsref_e.php
- First Nations Child and Family Caring Society - <http://www.fncaringsociety.com/child-and-youth-engagement>
- YOUNCAN - <http://www.youcan.ca/national/>
- Youth Fusion - <http://www.youthfusion.org/>
- Native Youth Sexual Health Network - www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com
- BC AFN Youth Council - <http://www.bcafn.ca/files/youth-council-representatives.php>
- First Nations of Québec and Labrador Youth Network - <http://www.fnyouthnetwork.com/>

OTHER RESOURCES

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>