

# 2016 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS APPLICATION BEST PRACTICES, Community Connections

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*Filled Friday, June 17, 2016*

## **Name of Local Government**

The Corporation of the District of Saanich/Parks and Recreation

## **Project/Program Manager Name**

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**The Mayor/Chair is aware that I am submitting this application on behalf of my local government.**

Yes

## Project/Program Title:

Youth Development Strategy and Implementation

## Project Summary Paragraph

*Please provide a summary of your project/program in 150 words or less.*

Saanich Parks and Recreation (Saanich) enjoys a legacy of leadership in youth recreation and youth development reflected through the creation of three youth activity centres, a community skate park, a large network of sports fields and quality youth programming and services.

The needs of Saanich young people have undergone significant changes since our last youth strategy (2003). A new guiding document taking into account these changes was required for Saanich to remain relevant and responsive to youth in Saanich. Therefore, in January 2015 a consultant was hired to work with Saanich staff and two community teams to start the year-long collaborative community-building process of public engagement to create a new Youth Development Strategy (YDS).

From extensive discussion and analysis of the results of our public engagement the result is six Strategic Priorities supported by specific goals, actions and outcomes detailed in the 2016-2020 Implementation Plan.

(<http://www.saanich.ca/parkrec/community/youth/Youth-Development-Strategy.html>).

## Project Analysis

### 1. INSPIRATION

*What was the inspiration behind the program/project?*

The District of Saanich is committed to pro-active youth development and strives to provide a broad range of high-quality accessible recreation facilities and services. Saanich works hard to meet the needs of youth new to Canada, have a disability or are economically disadvantaged.

The youth population in Saanich has been steadily declining since 2003. While it may be tempting to conclude that we could simply reduce resources for this generation, we believed that doing so for those aged 11-18 years would only exacerbate the current fragile state of “Generation Zero”. Rather, we hypothesized that these young people are experiencing unprecedented challenges from multiple social, economic and health-related forces to test the stereotypes of “entitlement” and “privilege”. We wanted to get as clear and accurate a picture of today’s youth in Saanich to provide a baseline from which to move forward in our service delivery.

Since our 2003 Youth Development Strategy, we have learned much about the changes youth experienced, particularly while a portion of Saanich youth continue to be successfully involved in sports and cultural activities, a growing majority of youth report being uninvolved in active participation for a variety of reasons. We wanted to better understand why. By tapping into the positive elements of recreation and parks and capturing participant’s dreams of the future, we wanted to reveal that beneath the surface lies a very complex picture for many of our youth, deserving of recognition as we develop and execute programs, services and amenities with them in mind.

## **2. GOALS**

***What did you set out to accomplish with the program/project? How effective were you in meeting your goals?***

Our over-arching goal was to understand why a growing majority of youth report being uninvolved in activity. We discovered a number of changes since 2003 that have influenced our strategic priorities including youth:

- being sedentary and anxious;
- identifying as distinct from the mainstream;
- being over-protected;
- experiencing nature-deficit;
- experiencing cost-barriers;
- facing few entry points to new activities;
- having low physical literacy skills, and;

- being excluded from decisions that affect them.

Further, a crucial goal was our explicit intention of accessing the leadership capabilities of Saanich youth to inform and drive this project from day one. Seven youth joined the YDS Project Team, comprised of youth representatives, community members, and leaders from Saanich and Victoria School Districts to guide the process and results. In addition, we created a YDS Research Team and two YDS Youth Interns whose roles included group facilitation, participation in focus groups and interviewing of youth as well as marketing, video creation, analysis and drafting of engagement summaries. We were very successful in ensuring this process was authentic and youth-focused. These youth exceeded expectations during all steps of the process ([http://www.saanich.ca/parkrec/community/youth/documents/YTH-StrategyFinal-RevA\\_000.pdf](http://www.saanich.ca/parkrec/community/youth/documents/YTH-StrategyFinal-RevA_000.pdf)).

Finally, in the analysis and writing phase, extensive feedback from youth and other stakeholders has been incorporated into the final implementation plan. As part of our ongoing commitment to this foundation of engagement, we have included specific goals, actions and outcomes which will ensure that we continue to honour the youth voice in our community as we move forward with our implementation.

### **3. STRATEGY**

***Discuss the role of social media and civic engagement in your local government's overall communications strategy.***

Information was publically shared and invitations to engage were offered through our Saanich Parks and Recreation Facebook page (currently 17 426 followers). Further, one of our Youth Interns created the “Re-imagine the Future” video to use as a promotional tool and co-designed the [youthdev.weebly.com](http://youthdev.weebly.com) webpage for this project. This site housed all upcoming engagements, the invitational video, and summaries of all engagements held.

Since 2013, Saanich's new Public Participation Policy has invested the corporation in the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) principles and public participation spectrum, with the goal to increase the level of public engagement and impact. The YDS was consciously designed to ‘Involve’ and ‘Collaborate’ with youth and the public, focusing on creating authentic means of connection with youth and hearing their perspectives on parks and recreation. This public engagement initiative involved over 1100 persons including youth, schools, community members and other youth-serving agencies and 44 engagements including Interviews, World Cafes, Focus Groups and Dialogue Circles as well as an online

survey, three Saanich Staff Think Tank sessions and one cross-generational “Summit”.

As our focus for public engagement was an exploration of youth perspectives and experiences with recreation, culture and parks, we embedded in all public engagements two change strategies:

- 1) Appreciative Inquiry – a process of first identifying existing strengths of youth services being offered and second, inquiring into future possibilities that will enhance or change services;
- 2) Inquiry – a process of using compelling open-ended questions to evoke personal values, perspectives and hopes.

#### **4. PARTICIPATION**

***a. How has this program/project increased community connections? Please provide measurable results.***

Saanich has enjoyed many, valuable community connections through neighbourhood associations, sports leagues, businesses, schools and social service agencies.

Through the engagement process, many new relationships were developed and existing relationships strengthened. Youth engagements held in middle and high schools resulted in open dialogue and new initiatives. Examples include participating in the School District 61 Love is Love Conference (2015-16), working with Claremont Secondary School’s Gr.10 Marketing Class (2016), and working with Saanich Parks to engage students in the Tolmie Park redevelopment project ([http://www.saanich.ca/parkrec/community/youth/documents/YTH-StrategyFinal-RevA\\_000.pdf](http://www.saanich.ca/parkrec/community/youth/documents/YTH-StrategyFinal-RevA_000.pdf))

Youth Programmers have been tasked with strengthening community collaborations and school connections with their “family of schools” and fostering community development with nearby youth-serving agencies and supporting youth in co-creation of initiatives. New community connections include intentionally engaging with gender-diverse youth and their families, supporting youth performance artists and entrepreneurs, and groups that support youth with disabilities. Schools that we have had little contact with are being re-approached or engaged for the first time to start a relationship and determine similar interests and goals. Recreation Centre Programmers are collaborating more often with Youth Services and within their own program areas to discuss and develop new or enhanced programs and services for 11-18 years.

At six months into the Implementation portion of the Strategy, many connections have been enhanced while new connections have been established as can be evidenced by the Youth Development Strategy 2016 Outcome Tracking live document, in continual use by the Saanich Youth Services Team. (G:\Community Services\Youth Services\Youth Strategy\2015 Youth Strategy\Implementation Plan\YDS Outcome Tracking 2016.xlsx)

***b. Demonstrate through analytics or other data, how your local government’s use of social media has supported dialogue between your local government and its citizens, community and business stakeholders.***

Reactions to YDS Posts on Saanich Parks and Recreation Facebook Page \* from available data

Date of Post	Reach	Likes	Comments	Shares
03/26/15	12048	47	3	2
05/29/15	1814	13	2	2
06/11/15	27910	87	2	27
10/23/15	475	0	0	0

**5. ECONOMIC IMPACT**

***How has the program/project saved the community money and/or resources or encouraged economic development?***

Although this project is not intended to encourage economic development, it has reconfirmed that youth are our future and benefit from Saanich subsidies for recreational opportunities in order to grow into resilient adults. With the youth population shrinking and the older population increasing, communities need to ensure that future wage earners have the mental, physical, and social health and necessary skills to function in society. Due to increased cost of living for families in Saanich, youth access to programs presents many barriers including program fees, transportation, time, and cost. Recreation is often seen as a luxury expense. The YDS clearly states that youth subsidies need to continue to ensure the healthy development of its young people. For example, youth will have the opportunity to co-create programs with Youth Programmers, developing planning skills and confidence which will benefit them as they enter into the local workforce and participate in the economy as young adults. The Saanich Youth Internship program

and other leadership development programs also allow youth to develop their employability skills and capacity to earn and participate in the economy.

The YDS planning process examined the way we serve youth in the community as a Municipality to ensure that resources are spent efficiently and according to the community's priorities and needs. The planning process examined what the Municipality was doing well, how we could improve and where we could grow our efforts. The 5 year implementation plan will ensure that public funds are spent according to the community's needs.

## **6. INNOVATION**

### ***What makes this program/project innovative and creative?***

While it seems counter-intuitive to exclude youth in a project that directly affects them, involving youth in decision-making procedures is often overlooked, ignored or dismissed driving our intention to devising creative and innovative methods to inform, invite, engage and report back to this population. The YDS Project Team was intentionally comprised of youth representatives as well as other adults, community members and leaders from SD61 and SD63 to guide the process, test the public engagement strategies and advise on results. The dynamic YDS Youth Research Team were trained in group facilitation then worked alongside Core Team facilitators at engagements and assisting in group facilitation during the Youth Summit. This ensured the process was authentic and youth-focused.

The use of creative engagement techniques was also innovative in design and included the Appreciative Inquiry process, Conversation Cafes, Focus Groups, “going to youth”, and Sounding Boards. Further, the inclusion of a 5 year implementation plan in this strategy ensures that the strategic directions will not only be taken into account but also embeds an accountability structure for staff and managers to ensure that the goals and objectives of the plan are met.

Lastly, some of the strategic areas are innovative. For example, shifting the role of Youth Programmers to be less youth centre-based and more focused on community youth development. The Outdoor Play and Risk strategic area also questions our risk-averse culture of society and is looking for ways to work within our system to increase opportunities for youth to take healthy risks.

## 7. CHALLENGES

*What kind of challenges did you face in the implementation and operation of your project/program? Describe your creative solutions for overcoming those challenges.*

While the Municipality has adopted the IAP2 practice of community engagement, the communication tools are not quite in place to support the use social media and online resources as a tool for engagement and transparency efforts. Youth clearly stated they are not using Saanich's current system of communication which is based in hard-copy publications, radio ads and Facebook. We worked with the existing social media platform as a promotional tool for engagements and we hired a youth intern to develop a website that would host all of the data we collected at community engagement events openly online.

Moving forward, we intend to work with youth to align our communication methods with their preferred means of connecting with one another and their support systems. This will entail a multi-tiered, creative and responsive approach that addresses the goals of:

- a) involving youth in the co-creation of creative, innovative and progressive communication strategies;
- b) ensuring communication to youth is youth-friendly, age-appropriate, relevant and current to changing needs, trends and technology;
- c) expanding and redesigning communication tools to use with schools, students and families.

Some specific actions include:

- creating a Youth Communication Advisory Team to help develop, guide and evaluate an on-going communication framework;
- adopting the best practice of "going to youth" to promote programs, identifying opportunities for youth-friendly promotions and artwork;
- to reframe our School Resource Guide to specifically promote to middle- and high-schools, and;
- to create a report format and develop an annual report identifying the outcomes of the YDS.



## 8. BEST PRACTICES

### ***What sets your local government apart from others in your implementation and use of community connection tools?***

One distinct tool that sets the tone for community connection is The Public Process Handbook (<http://www.saanich.ca/living/about/get-involved/documents/PublicProcessHandbookAug2015web.pdf>)

It is founded upon five Guiding Principles of Respect, Inclusiveness, Transparency, Honesty, and Access. Using the Best Practice of “going to youth” where they are, we engaged the leaders of DS61 and SD63 to gain their support and communicate the importance of this project along with the benefits it would bring to students. Having school district support via face-to-face contact with the principals, vice-principals and Youth and Family Counsellors was essential to access their students in their classes and clubs. We also met youth “where they were” at the Teen Centres during drop-ins and structured programs. We dove-tailed into opportunities provided by special events and conferences like the Cycling Festival and Love is Love. We invited ourselves to meetings of community service members with the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society and Island Health. Further, we organized to meet with our own Saanich groups such as the Healthy Saanich Advisory Committee and the Parks, Trails and Recreation Advisory Committee.

The best practice of the Appreciative Inquiry approach of “discover, dream, design and deliver” led participants to focus on strengths and assets rather than problems. Future-focused questions encouraged participants to think big and share their dreams, envisioning a better future for youth. Through careful data analysis, theming, and stakeholder and team feedback, the strategy and implementation plan was written in realistic, practical, accountable goals and actions, with both budget and timelines, with measurable outcomes.

## 9. TRANSFERABILITY

### ***How is this program/project transferable to other local governments?***

Saanich’s Youth Development Strategy, plans and appendices contain our process, methodology, engagements, and how-to so that other local governments can apply the process and findings within their own communities, or adapt to meet their own needs. The YDS is a document available online and for loan at our local libraries. It can be used as a guide to plan similar strategic planning processes or even could be completely transferable as a working document for any municipality to use.

Experiencing success with the Youth Development Strategy, the Department is now working on an Older Adults Strategy for Parks and Recreation with similar

methodology and process. This is evidence of its transferability within local government. Additionally, the approaches of 'go to the community' and engagement strategies are being utilized by our Saanich municipal departments in the engagements. (- Home) ...link to Older Adults Strategy

## 10. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

***What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to embark on a similar project?***

- a) Hire a capable consultant who understands the target population, recreation and parks, and has a willingness to work collaboratively in a team and mentoring approach with youth. Pacific Leadership Design worked well with Saanich.
- b) Involve and utilize the target population you are assessing to be co-creators of process, research facilitators, co-developers of the solutions, and overall to guide the project.
- c) Ensure approval and support from your Council/Board/Commission.
- d) Keep your participants informed and invited to submit feedback throughout the process.
- e) Plan your communication strategy and tools in advance. Ensure access to engagement tools. Have a strong public participation/engagement approach.
- f) Use our project as a successful model.
- g) Celebrate successes along the way.
- h) Build in ongoing evaluation, and a future implementation tracking and accountability tool.

## 11. TELL US MORE

***Please share any other information you think may help support your submission.***

During the scope of our YDS process, we became aware of other complementary actions which were outside of the scope of the project, yet represent a list of future considerations for the Parks and Recreation Department to further attend to youth and the community as a whole, such as:

- Explore the viability of resourcing a Community Engagement Coordinator for Parks and Recreation whose role would be to ensure positive, successful citizen and

youth participation in the development and implementation of Parks and Recreation projects

- Research and adopt an online collaboration tool to increase efficiency and organization during public engagement processes. It is important that multiple users can access the same document at the same time to maximize efficiency from multiple locations and authors (e.g. Google Docs enterprise).
- Research and adopt an engagement tool which can be used by Saanich Parks and Recreation and other departments during public engagement processes (e.g., Weebly).
- Develop a Recreation Division partnership agreement (template) which will assist in the creation and maintenance of new community partnerships.
- Recommend that the District of Saanich add a specific Youth Community Grant to its current grant offerings.