



# Municipal Engagement Recommendations for Edmonton's Next Generation

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# Connect, Contribute, Care:

*"The next generation is the future of this city, and I have great faith in their creativity and vision. City Council needs to hear what they have to say, and then be prepared to take action on the issues they see as priorities."*

--Mayor Stephen Mandel

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Connect, Contribute, Care: Municipal Engagement Recommendations for Edmonton's Next Generation* was created and led by Edmonton's NextGen initiative. A project team comprised of members of NextGen, City of Edmonton staff, and Councillor Don Iveson worked together with an Engagement Advisory Committee, made up of 11 individuals from a diverse cross-section of our city, to produce and assemble the recommendations.

The goal of this report is to provide simple recommendations to multiple audiences, including the City and Council, non-profit organizations, NGOs, and Edmonton's business owners, to move an engaged Edmonton forward, and ensure citizens can access opportunities in which they can Connect, Contribute, and Care for their individual communities, and the city as a whole.

### **The objectives of the report include:**

- Gain an understanding of gaps in engagement among the next generation in the City of Edmonton.
- Understand how to better engage the public in civic affairs, with special focus on next gen'ers and youth.
- Create strategies to encourage greater participation and meaningful civic engagement.
- Increase active participation of the next generation in the political process.

Research for the report was conducted by Leger Marketing and The Centre for Public Involvement. Leger conducted two focus groups and online interviews with engaged and non-engaged citizens between the ages of 18 and 40. They collected feedback on how engagement is perceived among next gen'ers, and insights on what motivates young people to become engaged and participate in civic life. The Centre for Public Involvement also provided valuable research with recommendations for policy, research, and practice surrounding youth involvement in political and civic spheres.

Through facilitated discussion, the Engagement Advisory Committee set the direction of the engagement recommendations, providing valuable feedback on the research and insights gained from their own diverse backgrounds based on the following four topics: Communication, Motivations and Barriers, Leveraging Networks, and Socialization. The following recommendations were the result:

1. Increase youth and next gen'er representation in your organization.
2. Build upon existing efforts that already talk to, engage, and support youth.
3. Encourage Councillors and City Administrators to adopt alternative information technologies and tools to communicate with youth and next gen'ers.
4. Extend the reach of City Hall into more classrooms.
5. Establish depth of engagement by tailoring opportunities.
6. Use plain language in all your public-facing communication.
7. Make room in the workplace for employees to share their engagement stories as part of work culture.
8. Develop a city-wide inventory of grants available to small organizations serving youth engagement.

*“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”*

--Winston Churchill

Community engagement is the spark capable of igniting limitless human potential. To be engaged is to Connect with people, Contribute and grow as individuals and organizations, and Care about the well-being of others. By making citizen engagement a priority, we ensure Edmontonians will live in a sustainable, thriving city where all possibilities are realized and reachable, and efforts yield positive impact.

The impetus for **Connect, Contribute, Care: Municipal Engagement Recommendations for Edmonton's Next Generation** was borne of an observation made by Mayor Stephen Mandel in the 2010 municipal election. He recounted an extraordinary energy and passion among next gen'ers, and asked how that energy could be harnessed and spread to a broader, citywide scale. In response, Councillor Don Iveson and the City's NextGen initiative took on the responsibility of leading and building the *Municipal Engagement Recommendations for Edmonton's Next Generation*.

There is no better time than the present to be engaged. It was important for NextGen to take on this work to find out what drives youth and next gen'ers to participate, and why they want to be involved. They wanted to uncover what it takes for the citizens of Edmonton to set the engagement agenda, and determine what is meaningful in their lives.



The objectives of this report are to:

- Gain an understanding of gaps in engagement among the next generation.
- Understand how to better engage the public in civic affairs with special focus on next gen'ers and youth.
- Create strategies to encourage greater participation and meaningful civic engagement.
- Increase active participation of the next generation in the political process.

A project team comprised of members of NextGen, City of Edmonton staff, and Councillor Don Iveson worked together with Leger Marketing and The Centre for Public Involvement to conduct the necessary research and set the boundaries of the project. The project team and the Centre also named candidates who could bring unique backgrounds and experiences from a diverse cross-section of our city, and act as stewards of engagement on the Engagement Advisory Committee.

Through facilitated discussion, the Engagement Advisory Committee, consisting of 11 members, helped to decipher emerging themes related to improving engagement in Edmonton. They provided valuable feedback on how engagement is related to the following four topics: Communication, Motivations and Barriers, Leveraging Networks, and Socialization.



## A DEFINITION FOR ENGAGEMENT

The following definition of “Engagement” launched this NextGen project:

*“Engagement is citizens of Edmonton actively participating in building, contributing to, and enjoying their city.”*

### Why is Engagement important?

Engagement is essential to creating a city’s social capital. It allows each of us to share our talents with our community, and gain valuable skills throughout life. Engagement also gives people a way to express what matters to them and make a difference.

From Great Neighbourhoods to Business Revitalization Zones, and being touted as Canada’s Festival City, Edmonton has many engagement initiatives to celebrate. We gather in our streets to walk and run for cure-seeking foundations, or spend time to help the less fortunate. By sustaining the continued engagement of Edmontonians we ensure a nurturing, well-rounded, and diverse society, where skillful and fulfilled citizens can grow and prosper. Invested citizens who are informed, involved, and dedicated to an aspect, or several aspects, of their community are accountable to outcomes and facilitate continuity of engagement in younger generations.

*“It is vain to talk of the interest of the community without understanding what is the interest of the individual.”*

--Jeremy Bentham

**We all have the capacity to be dedicated to one, two, or all three of the “Cs” of engagement.**

Engagement, by way of its own virtue, elevates quality of life. Through engagement, we are more likely to feel an affinity to where we live, and derive from that affinity a strong self-identity. When we **Connect**, we meet people and come across opportunities we may never have otherwise encountered. Each one of us is woven into our city’s fabric when we engage, whether that is volunteering at or attending a city event, supporting a candidate’s campaign, coaching a soccer team, or attending a public consultation.

When we make the decision to connect, there is always an opportunity to **Contribute** time, money, and/or skill to make a difference.

Ultimately, our communities are built on acts of kindness, and there are many thousands of ways to **Care**; it only takes a small gesture, like a passing smile or a shoveled sidewalk.

The challenge is to make engagement continuously present in the public conscience, and accessible to all citizens. It is important that our communities do not become complacent, and that what is important to us today does not dull tomorrow. We need to stimulate our senses, our conversations, our drive to acquire and grow skills, and to keep opportunities open at all times to those who want to connect, contribute and care.

### Other Definitions

#### **Citizens:**

The most inclusive term for all people living in and around the City of Edmonton.

#### **Corporate Social Responsibility:**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is part of a business’ effort to make a difference in the communities where they reside, and support organizations that are meaningful to employees or owners. CSR often results in a mutually beneficial relationship: Businesses contribute talent, money, or time in return for exposure in the community, business transparency and consumer trust, making core values actionable.

#### **Next Gen’ers:**

Demographic in the age range of 18-40 years.

#### **Youth:**

The time of life between childhood and adulthood, ages 12-18.

#### **Public Involvement vs. Public Engagement:**

“Involvement,” according to The Centre for Public Involvement, is defined, “The continuum of phases for engaging the public in municipal issues.

The continuum includes sharing information, consultation to test ideas and collaborating to build solutions and active participation in decision making.”

“Engagement” for the purposes of this report is less formal, and includes any definition of Edmontonians actively participating in building, contributing to, and enjoying their city in a civic and non-civic setting.



## GOALS OF CONNECT, CONTRIBUTE, CARE: MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDMONTON'S NEXT GENERATION

There are two goals for this report:

1

Provide simple recommendations to help support improved engagement, as well as to move an engaged Edmonton forward, helping citizens to find a path where they can Connect with, Contribute to, and Care for their individual communities, and the city as a whole.

2

To support *The Way We Live Implementation Plan*. In particular, the recommendations in this report support the target corporate measures of Goal One, "Edmonton is a vibrant, connected, engaged, and welcoming city," Goal Five, "Edmonton is an attractive city," and Goal Six, "Edmonton is a sustainable city." The recommendations in *Connect, Contribute, Care* align energy and resources with increasing the proportion of citizens who volunteer in their community, increasing the percentage of citizens with knowledge about city programs and services, developing volunteer opportunities, and increasing voter participation rate, among many other targets.



## HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report is a sharing of ideas and has multiple audiences. Recommendations for City Administration, the City Manager, and Mayor and Council are more prescriptive, whereas those facing external audiences, including employers, employees, NGOs, non-profit organizations aim to seek partnerships in the community, and are independent initiatives to encourage third-party engagement. As you read through, keep in mind:

This report is meant to be molded, bent and shaped to the structure of your organization, your family, or yourself, and in doing so, spark initiative and creativity, and renew a sense of engagement.

The intention of the report is not for every recommendation to be used by you or your organization or business, but to consider how one to two, or more has the power to push engagement barriers in our city. Each recommendation has an example of ways in which it can be fulfilled, but there are countless interpretations of how a recommendation can be executed.



## SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

### Leger Marketing

To gain perspective and valuable feedback on how engagement is perceived among next gen'ers, Leger Marketing held online interviews and two focus groups with engaged and non-engaged individuals. With 400 online interviews with Edmonton residents, between the ages of 18 and 40 years, Leger set out to find:

- What/How/Where engagement takes place
- Personal motivations for engagement
- The path to becoming engaged
- Perceived value in becoming engaged
- Barriers to (increased) engagement
- Awareness of engagement opportunities
- The “meaning” of engagement to participants

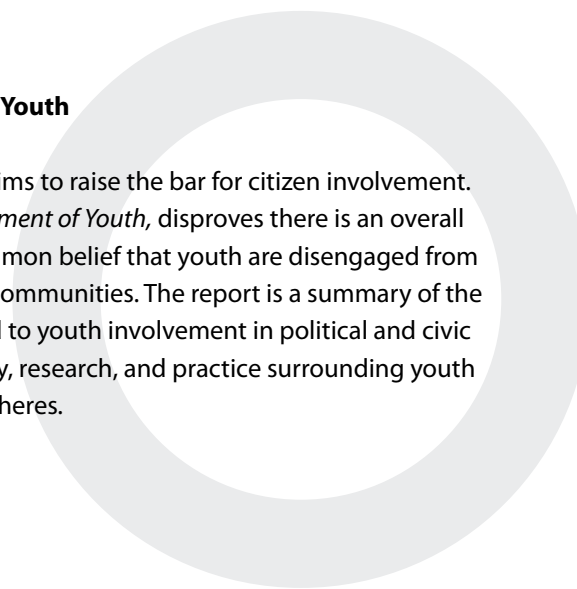
The online survey was designed to retrieve information on what motivates young people to become engaged and participate in politics and civic life, including voting, running for office, campaigning, sitting on City committees, etc. The interviews set out to find:

- The incidence of engagement among young people
- Frequency and scope of this engagement
- Attitudes towards engagement
- Barriers to increased engagement



### Political and Civic Involvement of Youth

The Centre for Public Involvement aims to raise the bar for citizen involvement. The report, *Political and Civic Involvement of Youth*, disproves there is an overall apathy among youth, despite a common belief that youth are disengaged from political and civic activities in their communities. The report is a summary of the academic and grey literature related to youth involvement in political and civic life, and recommendations for policy, research, and practice surrounding youth involvement in political and civic spheres.







## EMERGING THEMES

The Engagement Advisory Committee uncovered many ideas and recommendations, but most significantly, recognized three repeating themes that have the potential to increase engagement. This is what they found.

*As you flip through the following recommendations, each is colour coded to connect you back to its respective theme. The first page will outline the emerging themes in more detail. Subsequent pages outline recommendations related to each theme.*

# 1 Early Exposure

Positive, early-life engagement opportunities often results in life-long engagement of individuals.

# 2 Awareness and Invitation

Accessibility to engagement opportunities in Edmonton can be improved.

# 3 Catalyze and Activate

Creating positive catalytic events help citizens gain an engagement foothold in their communities.

## theme 1

### EARLY EXPOSURE

The Centre for Public Involvement asks:

*“Youth are involved with passion in civic and political arenas everyday. What will you do to engage with them?”*

Establishing rituals and traditions of engagement among youth has proven to pay life-long dividends. When parents, or other family members, teachers, and mentors are engaged, children and youth tend to follow, and upon reaching adulthood, are more likely to take initiative and claim ownership of their own experiences without relying on others to find and create them. Early engagement can imprint self-expectation and duty on youth and lead them to be very fulfilled by and dedicated to their communities.

An early introduction to engagement can encompass anything from volunteering to regular festival attendance; however, making community engagement inherent not only involves older generations setting an example and leaving a positive impression, but, more specifically, *making room* for younger generations to participate.

## theme 2

### AWARENESS AND INVITATION

*One of the most important outcomes of engagement is relationship generation; when we are engaged, we meet people we would not have otherwise met, we acquire skills and knowledge and interact on a deeper level with people while sharing a collective vision. How do we find a path to lead us to where we belong in our engaged community?*

Making engagement accessible is the first step. Leger Marketing's focus group and survey research revealed common barriers inhibiting young Edmontonians' engagement includes: "I was never asked," "Not sure where to start," and "Lack of awareness of opportunities."

Engaging individuals and groups who are currently under-engaged, perhaps because they don't yet know how to get engaged or why they should be, requires removing barriers and showing individuals how their talents, interests and voices can make a difference.

Conversely, the strongest motivations for engaging included:

1. "Making a difference"
2. "Helping others"
3. "Voicing my concerns"
4. "Helping myself" (build network, self-promotion, learning)
5. "My duty as a citizen"
6. "Staying informed"
7. "Civic pride"

Creating a path for the under-engaged means helping an individual to first identify his or her interests and what they deem important, then providing a place where they can latch onto a purpose and opportunity that is meaningful.

## theme 3

### CATALYZE AND ACTIVATE

*“Was there ever an experience or set of experiences that drew you into greater engagement?”*

The "catalytic entry event" was coined by Advisory Committee member James Hoffman to describe the one engagement opportunity in early life that is powerful enough to leave a lasting impression. A catalytic event can be big or small, but needs "activation energy," just like a chemical reaction. That activation energy requires a friend, family member, or mentor taking the time to help break down the initial barriers to engagement, and lead an individual to change perspective on his or her capability to make a difference.

The research reveals "Some Edmontonians are not sure where to find opportunities to participate in issues they care about." There is great value in creating catalytic entry events among friends, families, and peers. If you were to create one for an individual, what would that look like?



## INCREASE YOUTH AND NEXT GEN'ER REPRESENTATION IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.

*What is the percentage of individuals between the ages of 18-40 on your organization's board? Do they represent a voice on any of your committees?*

Engaged youth, no doubt, benefit from an early start in community engagement; however, value gained from their inclusion is not one-sided. Transfer of knowledge and ensuring the continuation of leadership in an organization is paramount to its survival, increased reach, and prosperity. Also, without representation where there are youth concerned, it is difficult to make programs reflective of what youth need, and have a true understanding of the issues they face when engaging in their communities.

### Increasing youth representation in your organization might look like:

1. High school students and university students are looking for volunteer hours to round out their experience and build a resume, and some are required by school programs to complete volunteer hours. Extend an invitation to youth and young adults through a social media campaign, or make your organization's opportunities visible through a university or college "list-serv" (online), or the institution's newspaper(s).
2. Create a mentorship, or "junior director program" for your organization. One example is a recent initiative at Edmonton Economic Development Corporation. The EEDC Board Intern program chooses two next gen'ers to serve one term on the EEDC board of directors to inject the voices and ideas of a younger generation, and "broaden skills of tomorrow's leaders."

City volunteer recruiters; external agencies

## ESTABLISH DEPTH OF ENGAGEMENT BY TAILORING OPPORTUNITIES.

*Citizens look for a chance to engage in their communities every day. How will you let them know they are welcome and capable of making a difference in your organization?*

When willing citizens hesitate to commit to an engagement opportunity, questions and concerns about time commitment surface. Among the reported Leger insights was "[Providing] varying commitment levels encourages people to get involved. Currently, engaged Edmontonians are volunteering about four times per month, and just under two hours each time."

Citizens also question whether they have the capacity and needed skills to be of value to an organization, and the job at hand. One barrier to engagement reported in the research was "Doubt of impact." Comments included "I am just a voice in the crowd, lost in the wind..." People want to know "How will my time and effort make a difference?"

Breaking down volunteer opportunities into time commitment and outcomes can make volunteering more accessible and appealing, breaking through time-restraint and skill-level barriers.

- Link engagement opportunities to a defined time frame of expected involvement. Citizens can choose how they will contribute based on the time they have available whether it is five minutes a day for a few days, or a full year.
- Make a "project plan" available so participants have an understanding of the beginning, middle and end to the engagement opportunity.
- Attach each contribution to a measurable, tangible outcome and a learning, or remarkable experience.

City Manager; Community Services; NextGen; Community Funders

## DEVELOP A CITY-WIDE INVENTORY OF GRANTS AVAILABLE TO SMALL ORGANIZATIONS SERVING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT.

*How do we keep youth and next gen'ers top of mind for funding opportunities, and when distributing grants?*

NextGen's "Ignite" engages a crowd-funding model in which people can present their ideas. In round one, a public vote chooses the top 10 ideas. In round two, a panel of judges selects one or two ideas to receive funding, volunteer support, and mentoring from established "makers" in the Edmonton community. This is one of many ways to identify and build awareness of existing funding and grant money available to next gen'ers to increase the reach of their organizations or events.

### Ways in which we can develop a city-wide inventory of grants available to small organizations serving youth engagement include:

- Enlist NextGen to create an updated, quick-reference list of small grants (\$1000-\$5000), available to organizations looking for monetary support for promotion, rental fees, or speaker

costs. There are many organizations in which available funding, scholarship, or bursary goes untapped every year, and NextGen is positioned to build awareness of that funding and enable other organizations to incubate and start up new projects.

- In the City's fund granting process, consider adding a question to funding applications asking "How many people on your board are between ages 18-40," prompting organizations to be conscious of including youth and next-gen'ers in their decision-making.
- If you are an organization that provides funding support, consider adding a category or "criteria-to-meet" to your application that encourages organizations seeking funding to meet a youth inclusion "quota."

### BUILD UPON EXISTING EFFORTS THAT ALREADY TALK TO, ENGAGE, AND SUPPORT YOUTH.

*What are you already doing to actively engage youth in their community? What new opportunities can you build upon? What organizations do you recognize that are doing a good job of engaging with youth?*

Youth, especially at elementary-school and junior high levels, are usually a demographic with opinions and civic identities yet to be shaped and expressed.

In their report, *The Political and Civic Involvement of Youth*, the Centre for Public Involvement cites “Youth are often excluded from many political campaigns... they are deemed as uninterested and a waste of campaign efforts, they lack experience in the political process, or they are regarded as lacking the political knowledge to properly engage in the first place” (30).

Building upon existing frameworks that already talk to and engage youth might look like:

- Move beyond the classroom to tie field trip learnings to curriculum outcomes. Field trips open up the classroom setting to include practical and more meaningful engagement that can leave a lasting impression on high school students.

- Identify ways to connect with organizations that already talk to youth (examples below). Meet with their representatives to gain knowledge on how to effectively attract youth to your own organization.

Edmonton Youth Council: [www.ceyc.ca](http://www.ceyc.ca)  
[www.speakout.alberta.ca/](http://www.speakout.alberta.ca/)  
[www.youthink.ca/](http://www.youthink.ca/)  
[www.youthvolunteer.ca/](http://www.youthvolunteer.ca/)  
[youthcentral.com/](http://youthcentral.com/)  
[www.aasca.org/](http://www.aasca.org/)  
[www.weday.com/](http://www.weday.com/)

- Leverage existing high school clubs to invite youth into deeper dialogue with the Councillor in the school's ward to discuss engagement opportunities, local issues, and understand how municipal government makes decisions.

### USE PLAIN LANGUAGE IN ALL YOUR PUBLIC-FACING COMMUNICATION.

*When you write a brochure, report, or web copy for an external audience, does someone outside your organization read it to ensure the language is accessible to the general public before you publish?*

Plain language puts the needs of the reader first. To make government reports and plans, a business website, brochures, and any other public-facing document inclusive, plain language is essential. An organization risks discouraging full participation of their target audience when readability isn't a priority.

Literacy Alberta is an advocate of using plain language. Their 2011 annual report states “A breakdown in communications is often a mismatch between a person's skills and the language

used. Literacy skill-building partnered with plain language communications is the best solution.”

**Test your public-facing documents for readability with the following:**

- Cut out long-winded sentences and eliminate bureaucratic jargon to make content more concise.
- Have someone outside your organization, or an out-sourced editor, read your documents and website to give feedback on clarity of

messages and information.

- Readability depends as much on great design as it does on the words on the page. Create visual appeal by using white space, images, and photos to break up written content.
- Read your documents out loud. Take note where you stumble on the content, and consider simplifying the language or sentence structure.
- If your documents speak to two or more audiences, consider multiple versions of a longer document.

### EXTEND THE REACH OF CITY HALL INTO MORE CLASSROOMS.

*How are you increasing the next generation's connection to civic affairs and municipal government? How do you think youth and next gen'ers find their voice in their civic government? What do you do to encourage them to vote?*

One of the key insights reported in the Leger Marketing research reveals “Edmontonians are more likely to be involved in non-political rather than political activities... Those who engage politically are more driven to ‘speak up’ on an issue, and those who engage non-politically are motivated to ‘help out.’”

*Make a Better City* is one example of a program creating a sense of community pride in grade six classrooms. In a social studies, mathematics, language arts, and/or health & life skills context, students learn about current issues in their city, such as graffiti and urban wildlife, and learn the reason for bylaws and how they are created.

There are multiple ways in which we can increase our level of civic involvement and political activities in Edmonton, starting in our classrooms. Some suggestions include:

- City Administration and Edmonton's School Boards could collaborate to formalize a toolkit of curriculum-linked activities and presentations for Councillors to use with students studying local government.
- Develop “City Hall 101” workshops for high school teachers to adopt and enhance both practical and theoretical learning in their local government curriculum.
- Bring council meetings to classrooms using smart boards and live-streaming. Open up a question period for an exchange between councillors and students through Twitter, or other social media.
- Connect councillors with school leadership groups, for example, a school council, to initiate discussion and create a platform where the student body can share opinions surrounding current issues or civic affairs.



## ENCOURAGE COUNCILLORS AND CITY ADMINISTRATORS TO ADOPT ALTERNATIVE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND TOOLS TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUTH AND NEXT GEN'ERS.

*Are you accessible on social media, knowing that younger audiences are using these tools?*

The Leger Marketing online interviews determined 88% of participants, aged 18-40, find their engagement opportunities using web search, an organization's website, personal referrals, or social media.

Next gen'ers increasingly use email and social media as primary sources of communication. Having the option to reach out to their councillors through a variety of means can allow citizens to better connect with their City.

Examples of using alternative tools to communicate might encompass:

- Create an in-depth online dialogue between councillors and citizens via an email panel, in which a Councillor sends out one question per month to be answered by a small and consistent group of engaged citizens in his or her ward. Answers can then be posted on the Councillor's website.
- Create a Twitter feed with a ward-specific hash-tag to encourage two-way dialogue in each ward. Twitter is a valuable place to not only get feedback, but also to post engagement opportunities, articles, and information.
- School counsellors can formalize a round table with high school students to increase civic socialization, and connect students to current events and local government curriculum. School counsellors can also invite the councillor in their ward to partake in one of the round tables.

City Manager; NGOs; businesses/for-profit organizations

## MAKE ROOM IN THE WORKPLACE FOR EMPLOYEES TO SHARE THEIR ENGAGEMENT STORIES AS PART OF WORK CULTURE.

*How do you, as a manager, business owner, or leader, foster connectivity within your organization or business to connect employees to their communities?*

Business owners have the power to create entry points of engagement for employees and colleagues, and increasingly, employers seek innovative ways to keep their most valued employees on board.

The following initiatives may prove worthwhile in increasing city-wide engagement through the workplace:

### An Engagement Wall

This idea is meant to spark conversation among employees, ensure civic connectivity and transfer of knowledge. It's a place where employees can post:

- Recent contributions employee(s) made to their community;
- A one-sentence take away that resonated with an employee after a board meeting or committee meeting;
- A newspaper clipping of something impactful in their city, organization or business.
- Volunteer opportunities.

Some answers portrayed in Leger's research included "I have a tough time finding somewhere to volunteer," and "I would rearrange my schedule for something I am passionate about." The Engagement Wall is an easy and timely way to

connect employees and your business to diverse engagement opportunities.

### Salute to Excellence: Engagement Leader Award

This is a new award to be presented at the existing Salute to Excellence event that honours individuals who have an extensive presence in their communities, and spearhead initiatives, mentorship and volunteering. Recipients of this award would ideally be organizations that have taken time to get employees engaged as leaders in their communities.



## THE CITY OF EDMONTON'S APPROACH TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Members of the Engagement Advisory Committee discussed on multiple occasions the importance of the City's role in enabling public engagement, particularly in regards to civic matters. The public consultation processes led by the City to engage citizens on various projects and issues are important avenues that citizens can use to voice their opinions and (hopefully) influence the decisions of their municipal government. Members identified important areas of change the City could pursue in how it delivers these processes. Two suggestions are:

- For every process or event, clearly describe the purpose of the engagement, i.e. is it to simply inform citizens, or will there be an opportunity for citizens to ask questions or enter into a two-way dialogue?
- Provide context for the process or event, to inform citizens about what stage the project or issue is at, and outline the expectations for participation. For example, is the project in its early stages when ideas are being generated? Is the decision currently being made and will citizen input influence the decision? Has the decision already been made and are people simply being informed, or will their input help implementation.

While the recommendations in this report have multiple audiences, the City of Edmonton is presently engaging in the following activities to increase public engagement in Edmonton.

### Corporate Approach to Public Engagement (CAPE)

The City of Edmonton has recently re-committed to coordinating and improving the way it engages with its citizens. It recognizes that some citizens have a very poor perception of how the City involves them in decision making. It is never possible to find a decision that all citizens agree with, however, it is possible to review and improve processes, and to engage people in a manner that is coordinated, consistent, meaningful and innovative.

The City is taking a renewed approach to public engagement, as well as making an organizational change. The "Office of Public Engagement," formerly the "Office of Public Involvement," now embraces the broad and inclusive definition of public engagement:

*"All the ways of bringing people, community organizations, businesses and government together to build community and participate in civic government."*

The Office of Public Engagement, which is part of the City's Public Communications section under the Corporate Communications branch, is focused on a cultural transformation through the application of key leadership principles. In particular, the principles of "We are one city" and "We do as we say" are clearly linked to the way the City thinks about and plans to deliver public engagement.

The City's renewed approach is also based on a fundamental belief that citizens have a right to be engaged in talking about and shaping civic issues, policies and projects, and, that they often have valuable contributions to make. Citizens should be engaged in conversations early in a city project's conception, and continuously.

In this way, the more traditional approach of "public involvement," which is about involving people in the decisions that affect them, typically on specific projects, is a subset of this broader public engagement approach. Similarly, "public consultation," which is a specific aspect of involvement that focuses on gathering feedback, input, ideas and suggestions, will also be a subset of public engagement.

The City's Office of Public Engagement will be working on coordinating and supporting the City's efforts on all of its engagement activities. These activities encompass:

- **Project-Based Engagement for decision support** (traditionally called public involvement).
- **Department Projects** (ex. On-Street Bike Routes, 112th Avenue Reconstruction, Surplus School sites) led by department project managers and public engagement practitioners, with advisory support and access tools and training provided by the Office.
- **Transformational Projects** (ex: The Downtown Arena and Entertainment District, the Blatchford Redevelopment). The Office will take the lead on the public engagement activities for these projects.
- **On-going Engagement for education, dialogue and relationship building.**
- **Neighbourhood Engagement** (ex. Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Traffic Management Program). Led by the Office of Great Neighbourhoods and their District Coordinators and Community Recreation Coordinators (CRCs), with access to tools provided by the Office.
- **Civic Engagement** (ex. E-Panel, Citizen Perception Survey, a civic education program). The Office will take the lead in developing tools and programs with collaboration from other areas in the organization.

The Spectrum of Public Engagement goes from information sharing, to consultation, to active participation. For each project or initiative that falls into one of these categories, the Public Engagement Spectrum will be

applied to specific events or activities, to clearly identify the engagement purpose and the related commitment, expectations, target audience, techniques and resources, which enables better planning and delivery.

In the past, the City has focused a lot on Project-Based Engagement at the department level with policies, procedures, frameworks and tools (ie, the *Involving Edmonton* workbook) designed to organize and support these efforts. Project-Based Engagement will continue to be an important part of what City departments do. Providing a coordinated approach for transformational projects is just now getting off the ground. The department of Community Services, and the Office of Great Neighbourhoods in particular, have recently put a focus on Neighbourhood Engagement. Broader Civic Engagement has occurred in pockets, typically on an ad hoc basis. The City has recognized there needs to be a better understanding of how all these pieces fit together, especially the important role that on-going engagement plays in laying the foundation for quality project-based engagement.

In addition, the City is beginning to recognize the significance of identifying engagement techniques and approaches that are meaningful to citizens. Everyone brings their own perspectives, history and characteristics to the table (i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, income, etc.) Also, important linkages exist between public engagement and other City supported initiatives, such as NextGen, Age-Friendly Edmonton and the Diversity and Inclusion strategy.

Public engagement does not always have to be City-driven. The advent of the World Wide Web and, now, social media means that conversations about important City issues, not initiated by the City and not facilitated by the City, are happening all the time. How will the City integrate social media and citizen driven engagement into its approach? Also, citizen expectations about how and where they will be engaged continue to grow.

The City's revitalized approach to public engagement will not become reality overnight, but there is clear alignment between where the City wants to go on public engagement and where this report suggests it should go.



## HOW DO YOU MEASURE YOUR ENGAGEMENT?

Knight Soul of the Community, in partnership with Gallup (a US research firm that studies human behaviour), is a three-year study being conducted across the United States, employing research methods and a fresh approach to determine what makes citizens of a community stay, and how community attachment contributes to an area's economic growth and well-being. "Just as actively engaged employees are more productive and committed to the success of their organizations, highly attached residents are more likely to actively contribute to a community's growth." To know how attached we are to where we live, we must look inward and assess our own actions and behaviours. Ask yourself the following:

### Individuals

1. What do I do presently to help others around me get engaged?
2. How do I support youth to get engaged in my community?
3. How many times a month do I support a local business?
4. How would I create a "catalytic event" for someone in my life?

### Organization/Business

5. Are the engagement opportunities at my organization accessible to all cultures and demographics?
6. How many times a month do we support a local business with our business?
7. How would your organization/business create a "catalytic event" for someone?





## NEXT STEPS

Through the work of the Centre for Public Involvement, City of Edmonton's Office of Public Engagement, and NextGen, Edmonton has taken on a leadership role in developing the capacity to engage all of its citizens. Engagement has many different faces. Coaching our children's soccer team, campaigning, spending four days at Folk Fest, taking a senior to get groceries; we, as individuals, organizations, businesses are all responsible for nurturing engagement in our city.

Next steps for this report involve distribution of the recommendations above, and measuring the growth of engagement in our city to determine if we are headed down the right path to make engagement sustainable from generation to generation.

### NextGen's next steps include:

1. Do a follow up survey with Leger Marketing in two years using the same questions and methodology to see if there are any noticeable changes or improvements in engagement.
2. Through NextGen members, have each person identify three groups to which they will present the report.
3. Track those groups and follow up with them in one year to see if they have implemented any of the recommendations, and if so, what benefits have they seen from those actions.
4. Monitor future voter turnout for municipal elections to determine whether community engagement efforts translate to increased political and civic engagement.

If we always think to invite Edmonton's youth and next gen'ers, making room for their voices in all realms of our city, we create a legacy of engagement. By being conscious of making engagement more accessible with plain language and defined timeframes and project outcomes, we change the perspective of those who seek engagement opportunities. By showing results, we win over those who may have doubted their capacity to make a difference. There is no sure way to measure the level of engagement in a city, but we can never become complacent if we are always conscious to share our greatest gift as human beings, to connect, contribute and care.



## THANK YOU

NextGen  
Centre for Public Involvement  
Leger Marketing  
Councillor Don Iveson  
Fiona Cavanagh  
Melody Viczko  
Cory Segin, CAPE  
Linda Hut  
Incite  
Carmen Morgan, Writing on the Wall  
Dan Nielsen  
Doug McLean

### Members of the Project Team

Ashley Casovan  
Mila Dimitrijevic  
Shelley Kwong  
Tegan Martin-Drysdale  
Brian Murray  
Keivan Navidikasmaei  
Carol Neuman  
Shan Yang

### Research

<http://www.soulofthecommunity.org>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plain\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plain_language)

### Members of the Advisory Committee

Mandie Abrams  
Erick Ambtman  
Garrett Boyko  
Catherine Broomfield  
James Hoffman  
Susan Kankkunen  
Masood Makarechian  
Mack Male  
Tamara McDonald  
Pauline Mukashema  
Alayne Sinclair

