



Involving Young People in Civic Matters

Child Friendly Edmonton

Supplementary Guide

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Involving Young People in Civic Matters – Child Friendly Edmonton



A. Introduction/ Rationale

With the recent adoption of 'Child Friendly Edmonton' by the City of Edmonton, there is now a focused effort on maximizing development potentials of young people in the urban setting. A key commitment by Child Friendly Edmonton to children and youth is the provision of opportunities to participate in civic matters that affect them. These opportunities exist in such areas as policy matters, program development and delivery, and project based initiatives such as park and play space designs.

In general, decision making for young people is done 'in their best interests.' Advocates however, have long recognized that children and youth are very capable of providing input on, and participating in civic matters that impact them. These advocates have worked diligently to produce the necessary resources and supports for use by those in positions to involve young people. They have been aided in this work by Article 12 of the UN convention on the Rights of the Child which enshrines participation by young people as a right.

Through Child Friendly Edmonton this right to participate has been given a higher profile and we are increasingly hearing 'Have you asked young people?' when new plans, policies and programs are being reviewed and approved. While this has represented a major step forward, a gap still exists between inviting young people to participate and utilizing appropriate processes that maximize their participation.

The City currently spells out how citizen engagement is to occur through the 'Involving Edmonton' guidebook. That document provides a comprehensive framework for involving citizens in discussions and actions that affect them. However, in recognizing that an extra effort is required if we're to be successful with children and youth in this regard, a supplementary resource was requested.

This resulting Supplementary Guide begins with an outline of the benefits of participation by young people in civic matters as well as guiding principles for their participation. It then spells out a series of 12 tools and techniques from the Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth (1) manual, each designed to ensure an effective involvement process. Next, special 'Child Friendly' outreach options are put forward along with evaluation considerations. Finally, a summary comment is provided which speaks to moving the overall initiative toward success over the long term.

Individual Exercise

Can you think of an initiative where involvement of young people could have been accommodated but was not considered?



B. Why Children's Involvement is Important?

Involving children and youth in civic processes has important benefits for the young people themselves, municipal government, and the community at large.

Benefits for Young People

- Gain new skills, self-confidence and self-esteem, which will help them in all aspects of their lives.
- Gain better understanding of government, of civil society and of the private sector, and how to influence positive change.
- Benefit from new and improved services that are more responsive to their needs.
- Develop a network of new friends, including community role models and resource people

Benefits for Civic Institutions

- The City will gain information about children as clients: their changing attitudes, needs, likes and interests. This will allow staff to provide quality services and reduce access barriers to those services.
- Children will bring fresh perspectives and new ideas about services, policies and ways of doing business.
- Involving children in the evaluation of services that are designed for them will mean that these services are assessed on the basis of actual as opposed to presumed needs.
- It makes good financial sense – involving children and young people leads to simpler and more cost effective solutions. This means money well spent.

Benefits to the Community

- The wider community will gain a more vibrant democracy through the involvement of children and young people.
- Local community cohesion will be enhanced with children more clearly visible as contributing members of society, included in the community, not excluded from it.
- Empowering children will raise aspirations for the community: we will all benefit from their energy and desire for a better future.

The goal must be to make the involvement of children and young people in all aspects of city life simply routine and unremarkable – a culture of participation. There are few roles that young people cannot assume, given information, training and support. There are many ways that they can be involved, and this will sometimes mean adapting the processes to ensure that they work for children as well as adults.

Individual Exercise

Can you describe some of the benefits of involving young people in a process that you were personally connected with or witnessed?



C. Guiding Principles for Involvement by Young People (Ladder of Participation)

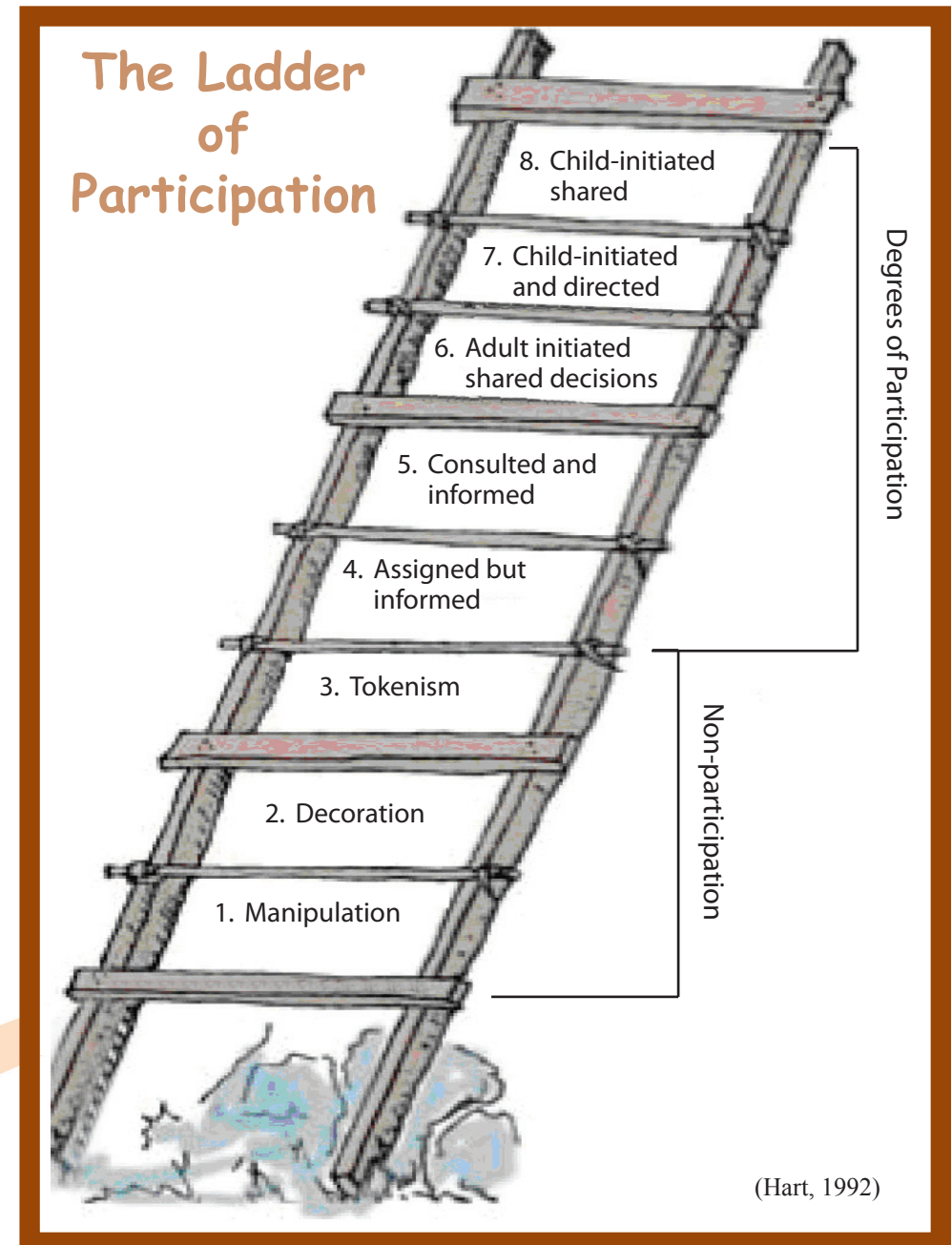
Having established both the rationale for involving young people in civic matters and the wide ranging benefits that accrue from this participation, it is important to spell out what constitutes 'meaningful' participation. Front-line staff have favoured a model called the 'Ladder of Participation' for young people as a way of helping to discern the difference between participation and non-participation (see figure 1). We will need to be vigilant in making these discernments when developing and enacting processes for involving young people.

The lowest three rungs on the ladder are generally said not to be meaningful participation:

- Manipulation refers to instances where adults consciously use children's voices to carry their own messages. This might include children creating drawings or pamphlets or posters without being informed why they are doing it.
- Decoration refers to children's involvement in a process in a visible way without their full understanding of what it is they are promoting.
- Tokenism occurs when adults committed to children's participation fail to fully think through the proposed processes and activities. Often children's processes modeled on adult processes fall into this category.

True participation happens at the higher rungs of the ladder:

- Where processes are described as 'assigned but informed', they are initiated and designed by adults, but the involvement of children is accompanied by an education program so they understand why they are involved.





- The next rung up, consulted and informed, takes this concept and adds involvement in the process design stage. This would include youth initiated surveys with children involved in identifying issues, crafting questions, and analyzing and presenting the results.
- At the highest levels of the ladder, children and adults work cooperatively together to create processes that are meaningful for children. The balance between the adult role and the child's role may vary, but children must understand and commit to both the ends and the means.

It is important to note that it often takes only subtle shifts in process to move involvement from non-participation to more meaningful participation.

Individual Exercise

Describe how you would have improved an involvement process with young people to move it up the ladder of participation.





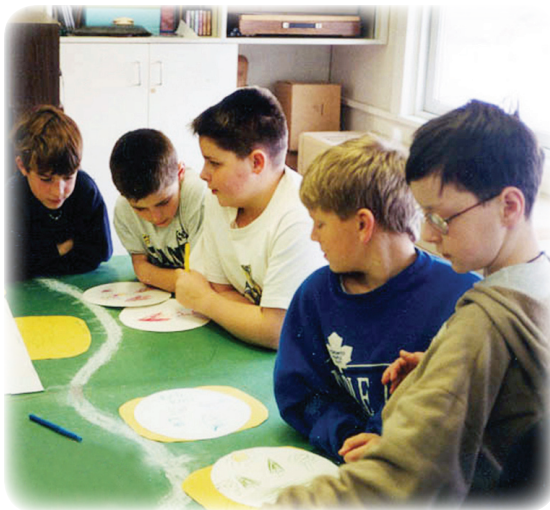
D. Twelve Tools and Techniques for Involving Young People

There are numerous possible methods for involving young people in civic matters. 'Creating Better Cities for Children and Youth' has prepared an essential base of methodologies from which local participation processes can be established. The following provides a summary outline of each of these methods. Complete outlines for each are available from the Child Friendly Edmonton Coordinator.

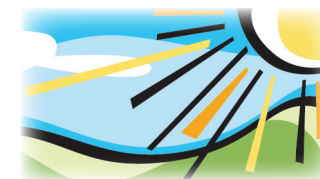
It is important to find a good fit between the tool and technique and its application to the situation whether it be a policy development matter,

program development and delivery, or a project based initiative. Additionally, some of the tools and techniques are better applied at the beginning of an initiative while others can be brought into play later on. As such, we need to consider the use of more than one of the methods when developing an involvement strategy.

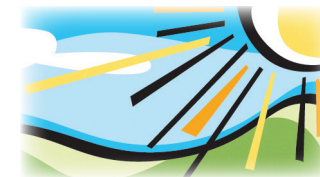
Finally, there will be many situations where participation opportunities fall within a broader public involvement process. Tools and techniques chosen should align with those being used for the larger initiative in order to ensure full consideration of young peoples' voice.



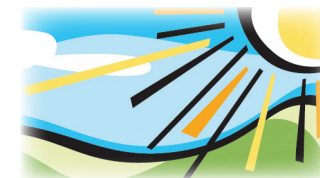
Example of 'meaningful' participation of children in the transformation of their school grounds.



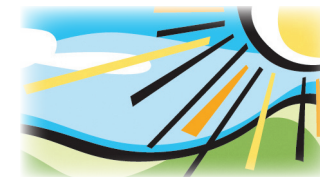
Method and Summary Explanation	Purpose	Maximizing Young People's Participation	Process Guide
<p>Informal Observations and 'Hanging Out'</p> <p>Informal observations provide anecdotal information as well as information about specific events or activities in the local area. These observations and anecdotes are generally kept in journals. 'Hanging out' with young people at a project site can reveal young people's perspectives and use of the local area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document use of the local area • Build rapport by spending unstructured time at the site • Confirm or clarify issues identified through other methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide journals for young participants • Share experiences 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'Hang out' 2. Conduct Training 3. Keep project journals
<p>Interviews</p> <p>Interviews are useful information-gathering tools, providing a systematic approach for getting input from young people (and other members of the community) as well as an opportunity for one-to-one interaction. For this method interviews instruments need to be developed and tested, interviews set up and conducted, and the information sorted, analysed and summarized.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect information directly from young people or others • Explore opinions and perspectives on key issues and questions • Spend time one-to-one with individual participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving young people in developing the interview instrument • Involving young people as evaluators • Training young people as interviewers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop, pre-test and refine the interview instrument 2. Schedule and conduct the interviews 3. Summarize and analyse the results.
<p>Drawings</p> <p>Young people's drawings of their local area provide a tool for discussing their perceptions of the area, their activities, their range of movement, and their favourite and least favourite places. Observations of the drawing process and the drawings themselves can provide insights about what is most and least important to young people. Drawings can be integrated as part of the one-to-one interviews, or done as a separate activity. They are a very engaging information-gathering technique and as such are a good 'ice breaker' activity for early in the process. They also provide a good starting point for conducting interviews and for launching exercises such as guided tours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage young people in a fun and creative activity • Initiate discussions on various aspects of the local area • Provide a tool for analyzing what young people value about their environment • Develop a visual database of young people's perspectives on their local area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a complete explanation of the exercise • Show respect and sensitivity • Do not interrupt • Provide enough time • Acknowledge that participants own their drawings • Give equal value to all drawings 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain the exercise 2. Take notes 3. Provide additional sheets 4. Discuss the drawing 5. Make notations on the drawing 6. Label the drawing 7. Copy and store the drawing



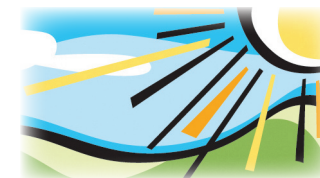
Method and Summary Explanation	Purpose	Maximizing Young People's Participation	Process Guide
<p>Daily Activity Schedules</p> <p>Understanding the activities that young people engage in during a typical day and the ways that they use their free time can provide valuable insights into their lives and values, including the ways in which they use the local area. The daily activity schedule is a simple technique for documenting time use. Rather than asking for general estimates of how much time is typically spent on various activities, it asks young people to provide a detailed account of the activities they undertook on a specific day that is fresh in the memory (usually the day before).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document young people's activities over the course of a day • Document where young people go and whom they see • Compare young people's statements about their lives with a systematic documentation of how and where they spend their time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a complete explanation of the exercise • Show respect and sensitivity • Provide enough time • Do not judge 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define the approach 2. Prepare an activity schedule form 3. Determine which days to conduct the exercise 4. Explain the exercise 5. Complete the activity schedule 6. Review the completed schedules
<p>Family and Support Networks</p> <p>Family networks often play a significant role in young people's lives, and can be supplemented (or sometimes replaced) by support networks of neighbours and friends. It is important to understand this important dimension of young people's lives, and how it affects their self-image, quality of life, and experience of place. Through this on-to-one activity, participants document and talk about their family and support networks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document family and social-support networks • Understand social-support relationships and dynamics • Understand the importance of non-family adults, such as neighbours and close friends • Understand how family and support networks affect young people's quality of life and sense of place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a complete explanation of the exercise • Show respect and sensitivity • Provide enough time • Do not judge 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain the exercise 2. Develop the family network diagram 3. Extend the diagram to include other important relations 4. Discuss the final diagram
<p>Role Play, Drama and Puppetry</p> <p>Some young people find it easier to communicate through role-play, puppetry and other forms of drama rather than answer direct questions in an interview. These methods are particularly useful for exploring sensitive issues and for finding out young people's views about adults. Dramatic productions that are written, directed and acted by young people can also be an effective vehicle for communicating their issues to a larger audience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow young people to communicate their ideas, opinions and perspectives in a non-threatening manner. • Help to develop rapport among young people and with adult team members • Draw upon local forms of communication and storytelling • Communicate issues and ideas to a larger audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a complete explanation • Show respect and sensitivity • Provide privacy • Let young people lead • Provide enough time • Do not judge 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select and/or train team members appropriately 2. Define the subject and form of expression 3. Encourage creativity 4. Facilitate reflection and discussion 5. Document the results



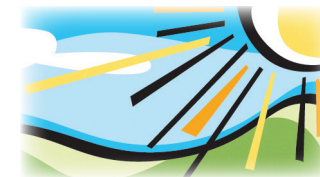
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<p>Guided Tours</p> <p>Tours that are guided by young people are consistently one of the most valuable methods for understanding their perspectives on and use of the local environment. Viewing places first-hand often elicits new information and serves as a catalyst for more in-depth questions and discussion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit places within the local area that are important to young people Directly observe and photograph the places and issues that have been identified during other activities Develop a better understanding of key issues in the local area and discuss them in greater depth Understand the connections and routes between various places in the community, and how young people move through it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give a complete explanation Show respect and sensitivity Let them lead Allow enough time Do not judge 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce the method late in the process 2. Introduce the exercise 3. Take the tour 4. Compile notes
<p>Photographs by young people</p> <p>Photographs taken by young people can be a valuable tool for gathering information and attitudes, enhancing information collected through the interviews and other methods. Photographs can become the basis for discussions about the local area as well as providing visual data about it. They are also effective for initiating communication with the larger community through gallery displays.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interact with young people in the context of their local area Engage young people in a fun and creative activity Develop a visual database on young people's perspectives of their local area Stimulate discussions on various aspects of the local area Communicate young people's perspectives to the larger community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give a complete explanation Show respect and sensitivity Give clear operating instructions Let them lead Provide enough time Acknowledge that young people own their photographs Do not judge 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce the exercise 2. Explain how to operate the camera 3. Take photographs 4. Develop, review and caption the photographs 5. Develop a gallery exhibit or photograph album 6. Catalogue and sort the photographs and notes



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<p><i>Behaviour mapping</i></p> <p>Behaviour mapping is a systematic observation technique for documenting the use of a specific space or location. It is not an explicitly participatory method, although it can be easily transformed into one, involving young people in the process of understanding, documenting how a space is used. The aim is to document how the space is being used, or not used, and the reasons that may lie behind those patterns of use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document use of specific place • Identify physical characteristics of a place that shape its use, either negatively or positively • Identify factors in a specific space that might account for differences in use by age, gender or ethnic group • Confirm or clarify issues about a specific location that young people have raised through interviews, guided tours and other methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a complete explanation • Let young people decide • Involve young people in the mapping 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin behaviour mapping after initial data collection 2. Focus on key places and/or key issues 3. Prepare a base map for each location 4. Map the space at different times of the day, on different days of the week or weekend 5. Note the time of day, date and weather 6. Plot the users 7. Add notes and photographs 8. Key observations and photos to the map 9. Document the volume of people moving through the site 10. Conduct as many 'cycles' of mapping as necessary until the patterns of behaviour and use are clear 11. Organize and archive the results 12. Analyse and discuss the results



Method and Summary Explanation	Purpose	Maximizing Young People's Participation	Process Guide
<p>Questionnaires and Surveys</p> <p>Questionnaires and surveys are used to reach large numbers of people to obtain their input on key issues or ideas. Questionnaires can be useful early in the participation process to generate a complete list of issues of concern and a general understanding of the relative importance of issues among young people or the local population as a whole. Questionnaires and surveys should not be the primary means of data collection and evaluation. They can enhance a participatory process, but are not in themselves conducive to the types of interaction and discussion that are necessary for a successful participation program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve a large number of people in giving input on project-related issues • Document community sentiment on key issues of concern • Provide statistically valid results to help to determine and support key project directions • Engage a small group (6-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a complete explanation • Let young people decide • Involve young people in conducting the questionnaire or survey 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define the approach 2. Develop the questionnaire or survey form 3. Pre-test the questionnaire or survey form 4. Develop a distribution plan and conduct training 5. Conduct the survey or questionnaire 6. Collect and tabulate the results 7. Compile and display the results
<p>Focus Groups and Small-Group Discussions</p> <p>Focus groups and other forms of small-group discussions are useful early in the participation process to identify key issues and to understand group dynamics. They are also useful later in the process to discuss the results of previous data-collection efforts and to develop a group consensus on a course of action.</p>	<p>individuals) in a discussion on local issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand community knowledge, ideas, attitudes and feelings • Develop constructive group dialogues and build consensus • Collectively explore and analyse the results of previous participation activities • Agree upon a course of action in response to identifies issues • Gather input from a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a complete explanation • Allow enough time • Let young people lead • Do not dictate or judge outcomes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define the format, group size, agenda and staffing needs 2. Train staff as necessary 3. Select the location and schedule the meeting 4. Establish ground rules 5. Facilitate and record the session 6. Summarize the results and follow up with participants



Method and Summary Explanation	Purpose	Maximizing Young People's Participation	Process Guide
<p>Workshops and Community Events</p> <p>This covers a broad range of group activities that are geared towards community interactions, information sharing, discussion and decision-making. They are typically highly visible events that help to develop community awareness and promote consensus building. Regardless of when they take place, community events should always be structured and implemented in ways that achieve real participation for young people.</p>	<p>large cross-section of the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the large group in a discussion on local issues • Understand community knowledge, ideas, attitudes and feelings • Community young people's views and the information they have developed to the community at large and key decision-makers • Build community-wide consensus for action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a complete explanation • Let young people lead • Give young people a voice 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define the format, agenda and staffing needs 2. Train staff as necessary 3. Publicize the event 4. Be prepared well in advance 5. Facilitate and record the workshop or event 6. Focus on participation 7. Summarize the results and follow up with participants



E. Special Outreach Strategies for Involving Young People

When preparing a public involvement plan, special needs of young people need to be considered to ensure a successful outcome. The following provides just a few considerations. There are many resources to help in this area and the Child Friendly Edmonton coordinator can provide direct assistance.

General Considerations

- Access – Includes both the informing of young people about the opportunity as well as physical access. A variety of communication options should be considered for inviting young people to participate. We also need to ensure participants can easily get to the location via public transit, walking, biking etc. Bus fares and or rides may need to be arranged. Holding multiple sessions in various regions of the city or community may also be looked at.
- Participant Safety - Includes both safe access to the opportunity and physical and social safety during the process.
- Time of day – Young children may not be able to attend an open house that starts at 7:00 pm, just as holding a session at 9:00 am on a Saturday morning won't fit for most teens. It is important therefore to consider the various constituent needs when setting involvement times for young people.
- Appropriateness of the materials and process – Efforts are required to ensure the process and associated materials engage a range of ages and cultural backgrounds of children as well as abilities. In addition, for those initiatives that are part of a larger public involvement process it is important to scrutinize outcomes and find alternative ways to get at the same end result using the tools and techniques described in this document.

- Child-care – Many involvement exercises require support for families with younger children who may not want to be fully engaged throughout the process. Having child-care available in some way can significantly improve participation by everyone.
- Permissions – Formal completion of permission forms for those under 18 are now a requirement for most involvement processes. Check with the Child Friendly Edmonton Coordinator or Involving Edmonton for further direction and forms.
- Food – Always an enticement for engaging young people as well as keeping them 'powered up'. Think about the healthiness of the food that is being offered, eg. water and juice is better than pop.
- Thank-you – We value children's participation in civic matters and as such, we need to thank them for their efforts. Options include small gifts such as a Frisbee or yo-yo or gift certificates such as a facility pass. In addition, those who host the initiative including schools and community groups should also receive an appropriate thank-you.

Special Needs

- Accessible facilities – All facilities chosen must be able to accommodate those with special needs, particularly those in wheel-chairs.
- Voice for all – Extra effort **needs to be given to ensure** that support is provided for giving voice to those with disabilities.



F. Evaluation Considerations

There are many evaluative dimensions to consider both during and at the conclusion of an involvement process with young people. The following provides just a few suggestions:

- First and foremost, did involving young people improve the project, policy and/or service – Did it make a difference?!
- Was the tool/technique chosen the most appropriate to get at the identified outcomes?
- Did the formatting and delivery of the process work according to expectation?
- What could be done for next time to inform and improve both the tool/technique and the delivery of the process.
- Overall, was the process ‘meaningful’ within the Ladder of Participation? If no, what could be done for next time to move the process and its delivery up the ladder, eg. follow up with participants on results and next steps.
- Was the involvement process plan and delivery well documented for future use and improvement as well as sharing and discussing with others.

G. Moving Forward

(Adapted from Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth, p. 178)

Creating better cities requires a long-term commitment to young people’s participation in the community development process. No participation process is ever perfect. There is always room for improvement. Similarly, no participation process can ever be fully replicated. Every place and point in time will present unique circumstances, each requiring a unique response. Lessons learned – positive or negative – should be constructively applied in subsequent projects.

As we gain practice and confidence in working with young people in participatory ways, we will develop new methods and approaches for encouraging greater participation. The young people we are working with will begin to take a more active role in facilitating the process and implementing change.

There is no ‘magic’ in the methods and process guides. The magic lies in the people who make participation happen, and the human interactions that enlighten us, inspire us, and – in the end – provide the essential and lasting foundations on which better cities can be built.

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