



## « CITY OF VANCOUVER CIVIC YOUTH STRATEGY »

Vancouver, Canada

*Period of implementation: 1995 (launch) | Study case written in 2010*

The Civic Youth Strategy is a coordinated long-term plan of action providing a framework to support the City's work with young people (9 to 24 years old) and to engage Vancouver's diverse youth communities in civic issues. In December 1995, in response to various youth issues in the City and to fulfill requirements of the City's Children's Policy adopted in 1992, Vancouver City Council endorsed the creation of the Civic Youth Strategy. The objectives of the Civic Youth Strategy are: to work in partnership with youth and the larger community; to ensure that youth have a place in the city and a voice in decision-making; to promote youth as a resource in decision-making; and to strengthen the support base for youth in the City. The main results from the policy include greater awareness and appreciation of the value of youth participation in decision-making and policy development within the City. Within the context of Vancouver's large and diverse demographic, community organizations and municipal and other government agencies had the opportunity to collaborate with the City and youth to move forward on implementing appropriate programs and policies relating to diverse young people.



The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** was launched in 2008 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights with the aim of creating a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. The initiative was developed with the scientific support of Professor Yves Cabannes (University College of London) and the Centre for Social Studies (CES) from the University of Coimbra. At present, the Observatory contains more than sixty study cases mostly developed between 2008 and 2010. Even though many of these cases refer to policies that have already come to an end, they still have much to offer: from capitalizing on the learning acquired by other local authorities to discovering suggestive and alternative means to address social inclusion challenges from a local perspective.

## Context

### *City context*

Vancouver is the largest city in the province of British Columbia and the third largest city in Canada. It is approximately 114 km<sup>2</sup> in size, with a population of approximately 639,000 (BC Statistics estimate 2009). The City of Vancouver is situated within the Metro Vancouver urban region of approximately 2.3 million inhabitants (2000 est.). Metro Vancouver contains 22 municipalities, one electoral area, and one treaty First Nation (Metro Vancouver 2010).

The City of Vancouver is governed by the Mayor and the Council, consisting of 10 City Councillors (City of Vancouver 2010a). The City administration is made up of numerous service groups, departments, social operations and programmes, and three boards governing the Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver Police, and Vancouver Parks and Recreation (City of Vancouver 2010b).

### *Government and decentralization context*

In Canada, municipalities are creations of the provinces. Provincial governments provide municipalities authority over certain decisions, usually through a Municipal Act or Local Government Act. In British Columbia, the City of Vancouver is unique as it is governed by a provincial statute called the 'Vancouver Charter', whereas all other BC municipalities are governed by the Local Government Act. The Vancouver Charter contains the rules that govern how the City operates, the by-laws City Council can create, and how budgets are set (City of Vancouver 2010a). Additionally, it allows for the City to modify its Charter by submitting private bills to the BC legislature (Punter 2003), which provides the City with some flexibility to respond to various local circumstances as they arise (Punter 2003).

**Institutional level of policy development:** Municipal

### *Social context*

Vancouver's population consists of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, with immigrants representing 45.9% of the total population and Aboriginals almost 2% (City of Vancouver 2003a). Youth between the age of 15 and 24 years made up 13% of Vancouver's total population in 2007 (Smith et al. 2009). According to the 2008 Adolescent Health Survey (McCreary Centre Society 2009), 34% of Vancouver students were born outside of Canada and 17% had lived in Canada for less than 5 years (Smith et al. 2009). As a result, many Vancouver youths may not have cultural ties to local institutions and processes within the city. In addition to Vancouver's ethnic and cultural diversity, Vancouver also consists of youths who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and disabled, further diversifying the demographics of the city (Smith et al. 2009).

Although Vancouver is often rated as one of the best cities in the world to live, Vancouver is not free from social and economic problems. More than 20% of the families live below the poverty line, with the socio-economic conditions generally being lower among visible minorities and most severe for First Nations families (Blanchet-Cohen 2006). In 2008, the average hourly earnings for youth (age 15-24) in Metro Vancouver was 39% less than the average earned by the overall labour force and, in 2005, one third of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 lived in households where the average income fell below the poverty line. This percentage increased among youth living independently, where 70% of these youth fell below the poverty line (Smith et al. 2009).

In terms of education, a number of youth in school have expressed low satisfaction with what they were learning at school, with only 39% respondents in grade 12 indicating in a BC Ministry of Education survey that they were satisfied either 'all of the time' or 'many times' (Smith et al. 2009). Furthermore, fees for post-secondary educational institutions were 6.5% higher in 2008/2009 than in 2004/2005, and 7% higher than the Canadian average. Low satisfaction in high schools and high post-secondary fees may deter youth's interest in furthering their education (Smith et al. 2009).

Given Vancouver's aging population, it is vital for youth to be prepared and skilled to take fiscal and social responsibility as they transition to adulthood (Smith et al. 2009). However, with only a 31% turn-out of voters in the 2008 municipal elections (City of Vancouver 2008), it is clear that there is a need for greater civic engagement within the City. To encourage civic engagement among youth, it is important to look at the diverse youth demographic and the barriers possibly discouraging them from civic engagement. The Civic Youth Engagement Policy, a long-term plan involving youth as active participants in all aspects of civic services, directly addresses this challenge.

## Policy development

The Civic Youth Strategy is a long-term plan of action addressing the role of municipal government with and for young people (9 to 24 years old) in the City of Vancouver. It commits the City of Vancouver to involve youth as active partners in developing, assessing, and delivering civic services having a direct impact on youth and in broad-spectrum community consultations and initiatives. It also commits the City to promote and support youth-driven youth groups as a key consultation resource to ensure voices of youth are heard.

## *Background*

Following Canada's endorsement of the UN Convention to the Rights of the Child, in 1992, Vancouver City Council approved a three-year Children's Agenda and a Children's Advocate staff position with a three-year term to implement the agenda (City of Vancouver 1992). The position adopted a youth focus and was adapted to a Child and Youth Advocate position (Yates, Thorn and Associates 2001). In December 1993, the Director of Social Planning and the General Manager of Parks and Recreation announced a joint initiative to develop a Civic Youth Strategy. Concerns leading to the development of the Civic Youth Strategy included: youth violence, racism, and drug abuse; negative news media portrayals of youth leading to the youth population being discounted by the community; federal budget declines affecting post-secondary education, job training, and job creation strategies; and the need to better coordinate many youth services available in Vancouver (City of Vancouver 1995).

The Civic Youth Strategy was adopted in March 1995, addressing the role of municipal government with and for youth. The Child and Youth Advocate realigned her work to focus on the role of civic government in addressing the issues of preteens and youth. A core group was formed, co-chaired by the Social Planning Department and the Park Board, and including representatives from Health, Library, Police, City Clerks, Vancouver School Board, youth, and the City's Integrated Services Teams Initiative. This group assisted all City departments to develop plans integrating youth policy, principles, and objectives into their procedures. In addition, other key players included non-profit organizations providing community-based services to youth, other levels of government delivering and/or supporting youth services, and citizens, in particular, parents (City of Vancouver 1995). In April 2002, based on reviews and consultations about the Civic Youth Strategy, a pilot project was implemented to improve the

ways the Civic Youth Strategy connected with and involved young people. A key element to this model was the development of the Youth Outreach Team (City of Vancouver 2006).

Throughout the development and implementation of the policy, the collaboration among key players and motivated department staff were key in terms of understanding what needed to be accomplished, how it could be accomplished, and the available resources.<sup>1</sup>

### *Policy objectives*

The Civic Youth Strategy was a statement of commitment to work in partnership with youth and the larger community to achieve four core objectives:

1. To ensure youth have 'a place' in the city (youth-friendly public services, facilities, and spaces);
2. To ensure a strong youth voice in decision-making;
3. To promote youth as a resource to the City (an assets-based approach combating negative public/media perceptions of youth); and
4. To strengthen the support base for youth in the city.

Three guiding principles for conducting this work were also established by the Strategy:

- Strong youth involvement at the local level;
- Partnership in planning and implementation (with youth, other government agencies, and community organizations); and
- Assistance and support rather than control and management.

The strategy was left broad, allowing room for flexibility and interpretation depending on opportunities, resources, and staffing availability.<sup>2</sup>

### *Chronological development and implementation*

#### ***Stage 1: Policy development, adoption, and community endorsement***

In 1995, the Civic Youth Strategy was developed to fulfill the requirements of the City's Children's Policy, which had been adopted by the City of Vancouver in 1992 following Canada's endorsement of the UN Convention to the Rights of the Child (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a). After City Council approved the Civic Youth Strategy, its implementation was coordinated by a core group of stakeholders, with the lead City staff being the Child and Youth Advocate, an independent contract position reporting directly to the Director of Social Planning (Yates, Thorn and Associates 2001).

#### ***Stage 2: Review and recommendations for the development of the Civic Youth Strategy***

In 1999, the City initiated a review of the Child and Youth Advocate's position and replaced it with a full-time (regular) staff position within Social Planning, focused on Youth and Children's issues. At the time, it was recommended that a coordinated, team approach be taken to address children, youth, and family issues (City of Vancouver 2002). After hiring the Child and Youth Social Planner, a second review took place. Key challenges were identified, and recommendations for a new model were made. A young person with relevant community and

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Julianna Törjék, 6 December 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with Törjék, 6 December 2010, and Debbie Anderson, 8 December 2010.

youth experience was hired to work with the Child and Youth Social Planner to develop the new model (City of Vancouver 2002).

In April 2002, Council approved the pilot implementation of the new Civic Youth Strategy model to improve the way that the City would connect with and involve young people. The key element of the new model was the Youth Outreach Team (YOT). The YOT was piloted, consisting of three youth hired as City staff and one part-time Social Planner to work with the Child and Youth Social Planner, coordinating and implementing projects, activities, and initiatives. The goal was to engage youth, City staff, and community groups in collaborative efforts to meet the goals and objectives of the overall Civic Youth Strategy policy (City of Vancouver 2003).

***Stage 3: Moving forward with the Civic Youth Strategy***

In 2003, the Council approved the Youth Outreach Team and the Child and Youth Advocate position was reinstated as an independent position that reported directly to City Council. The YOT positions were hired through job postings crafted by the senior planning staff with input from other YOT members. Postings were shaped based on the nature/focus of the work at any given time. Based on their knowledge and leadership in community and youth issues, they were hired as City staff for terms ranging between 18 months to 2 years (United Way Toronto 2008). Work plans were drawn up for the year (with some flexibility to add new items as they arose) and staff were assigned projects/pieces of work based on interest and skills. Staff worked both independently and as a team, attending weekly team meetings and received individual mentorship as identified/requested. Positions ranged from full-time (35 hours/week) to part-time or auxiliary. The auxiliary and flexible nature of the Youth Outreach Team positions allowed for staff turnover, encouraging diversity among youth represented and the team (United Way Toronto 2008).

A part-time Youth Advocate Mentor position was also approved to assist the Child and Youth Advocate (City of Vancouver 2004). The Youth Advocate Mentor, selected by the Child and Youth Advocate, would be between the age of 15 and 24, have knowledge and experience dealing with at-risk youth, and have strong advocacy skills. A good part of the advocate mentor's job was to try and identify and build on existing youth networks and coalitions; the goal was to identify needs and build cohesiveness where possible, and identify common directions where the advocate and advocate mentor could add value.

***Stage 4: Organizational changes in the Civic Youth Strategy staffing and re-organization of the department from 'Social Planning' to 'Social Policy Group'***

In 2006, the Child and Youth Advocate Office was discontinued (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a). Subsequently, in 2009, due to organizational changes and political will, YOT members that acted as a separate unit became part of the Social Policy Group, no longer strictly focusing on youth.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, with the Youth Outreach Team, Child and Youth Social Planner, part-time Social Planner, Child and Youth Advocate, and part-time Child and Youth Advocate Mentor, many projects were completed and legacies were created. Over time, changes in senior management and political leadership affected the context in which policy functioned. This was a challenge as staff had to keep moving forward despite the changing environment, and keep focused on the main agenda of supporting youth. As resources tightened and other priorities emerged, there were not enough staffing resources in the overall department to enable the YOT team to focus strictly on youth, resulting in lessening of the youth-focused work. The practice/policy is still in place,

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Törjék.

but the organizational structure has changed. It is difficult to determine the level of future and current commitment to the practices/policies since the organizational changes have been recently implemented.

## *Stakeholders, beneficiaries and participatory methodologies*

### **Agents involved**

Partners involved in implementing the strategy included the City of Vancouver departments; community partner organizations; adult youth workers; youth-driven groups; and youth themselves.

### **Beneficiaries**

Youth were given opportunities to engage with the resources offered by the city, and to gain an understanding of the roles of civic government and the importance of civic engagement (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a). Community organizations, municipal agencies, and other government agencies collaborated with the City and youth to move forward, implementing appropriate programmes and policies relating to young people and the Civic Youth Strategy. The specific groups reached through the policy depended on the specific context, opportunities, and resources available.<sup>4</sup>

### **Participation processes implemented**

To assist in the implementation of the strategy, the City of Vancouver's Youth Outreach Team worked actively on facilitating the participation of youth in municipal government. In the first few years, the Team strategically focused on pursuing achievements in ensuring youth have a 'place' in the city, and promoting youth as a resource to the City. More recently, the Team integrated more closely within the Social Policy Division and concentrated on facilitating youth participation through: (1) developing youth civic leadership (building community capacity), (2) engaging youth in municipal and community decision-making processes, and (3) supporting youth organizing addressing local issues. The Team engaged youth in a broad range of municipal decision-making and policy development processes, including drug policy development, library policy development, community planning, transit planning, municipal environmental policy development, and municipal elections.

The City of Vancouver has encouraged youth to be involved in civic decision-making in various ways: youth have been participants in a program or project, as mentors to other youth, and have taken a lead role in deciding how a program runs. For example, the Youth Politik program provides opportunities for young Vancouver citizens (ages 15-19) to learn about municipal government and how it works. Participants are given the opportunity to build their leadership skills, public speaking skills, work in teams, and gain knowledge about civic processes and issues, encouraging them to get involved in their community. Youth interns were hired within the Social Policy Group to be involved with all aspects of Youth Politik event planning and recruitment. To promote the event to other youth, youth interns in the City delivered presentations about the program at schools, community centres, and neighbourhood houses. The peer-to-peer approach encouraged a greater connection between the presenters and other youth. Afterwards, Youth Politik alumni are put on an e-mail list and informed of different opportunities to get involved within the City, including volunteer opportunities in the community and involvement in municipal decisions such as neighbourhood planning.

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<sup>4</sup> Interviews with Törjék and Anderson.

Youth-led and youth-focused organizations in Vancouver also participated in the Civic Youth Strategy, providing an opportunity for the City to have direct connections with the community's non-profit youth sector in order to help make the City more accessible and accountable to young people.<sup>5</sup> Overall, these organizations focus on capacity-building and advocacy (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a), while addressing specific youth issues, including street, aboriginal, immigrant, or queer youth, and more broad-based issues like the environment (through organizations such as the Environmental Youth Alliance). With the City's recent organizational changes affecting the Youth Outreach Team, some challenges regarding the participation of the NGOs arose, where the Department's capacities no longer met the expectations of the community partners. Through this experience, the City learned that clear communication regarding its roles and level of participation is a backbone to continue to encourage and enable effective collaboration with key community partners.<sup>6</sup>

## *Institutionalizing and financing*

### **Institutionalization processes**

Institutionalization processes include youth participation in the development of various local policies, guidelines, and programme development; municipal civic leadership development programmes for youth; and the establishment of the Youth Outreach Team as permanent City staff. The integration of youth-generated policy recommendations have been left up to the discretion of staff who act on specific policy areas based on a range of factors, including civic jurisdiction, political will (local, provincial, federal), availability of funds, and the ability to organize/advocate in partnership with community agencies and other departments.

The YOT promoted Civic Youth Engagement through building bridges between the youth community and the City. The YOT offered an opportunity where City staff and young people could communicate with one another (Blanchet-Cowen 2006b). For example, the YOT worked with the City's Drug Policy Program to involve young people in developing a strategy to prevent harmful drug use and promote safe and healthy communities. The planning of this project was a collaboration between the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Police Department, the University of British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver (Macpherson et al. 2006). The City funded two youth organizations providing training to youth facilitators to undertake youth consultations on the policy (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a). Based on these consultations, a draft policy was created and evaluated by youth for feedback. The City then hired a youth to translate the policy into a youth-friendly version, '*the Short and Sweet Version*'. Subsequently, another youth was hired to implement the policy (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a).

An example of an initiative developed within the context of a neighbourhood planning process is a youth-focused photo project, a collaboration between the Social Planning Department and the Mount Pleasant Neighborhood House in Vancouver. The project engaged youth in a photo asset mapping project focussing on how they perceived and experienced their neighbourhood in terms of being a safe, nurturing, and evolving place to live. Through the project, youth contributed to the Mount Pleasant Planning process being undertaken by the City of Vancouver in the Mount Pleasant community<sup>7</sup>, and are now creating short films on community issues of relevance to them which will be used to highlight further changes they would like to see in their neighbourhood (Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House website 2011).

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Steven R. Dang, 8 December 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Interviews with Törjék and Anderson.

<sup>7</sup> The youth later received recognition for this work through receiving a City of Vancouver Youth Award.

Additionally, over the years, the municipal public library has increased the number of youth librarian positions to better cater to the needs and interests of youth in their communities. Vancouver Public Library (VPL) staff requested and received training from YOT on the best practices of youth engagement and, since then, have begun re-defining the role they can play in young people's lives. For example, the Vancouver Public Library has:

- Provided a forum for youth through a VPL youth council, and allowed youth to help shape and influence programming;
- Provided a free gathering space for youth;
- Implemented an award-winning online homework support/tutorial program (this lost funding from the province in 2010; and
- Designated youth librarian positions to work with and for youth and to create and adapt youth programming at the library branches.

The Vancouver School Board has also been an integral aspect of the Civic Youth Strategy, and has worked closely with the YOT. For example:

- The YOT partnered with the Engineering Department's Graffiti Management Program to develop school-based presentations on graffiti;
- The YOT created and delivered a Civic Education Workshop to show links between youth's daily lives, the City's Capital Plan, and how it affects them; and
- The YOT worked with the City's Public Involvement Coordinator and partners in the youth community to help pilot the City's Civics Curriculum, and provided workshops for VSB teachers who were interested in the curriculum, giving them the opportunity to review it, to make suggestions, and to indicate how they would like to be involved (City of Vancouver 2003).

Since the recent departmental reorganization, the YOT is no longer a separate entity and the Child and Youth Advocate Office has been discontinued, resulting in staff within the Social Policy Group no longer focused specifically and working only on youth issues. These organizational changes have led to less staff time allocated specifically to youth issues, and more responsibility on other departments to initiate programs surrounding the CYS. To date, four staff (who were part of the YOT) continue to work with the Social Policy Group. Each staff member plays some part in executing functions that were formerly held by the YOT, such as the youth website, youth programming (the Youth Politik program), youth involvement in planning processes, and youth-focused outreach during civic elections.

## **Financing**

The City of Vancouver funds the policy. Some projects have included outside funding and contributions from community organizations for certain initiatives. Operational costs are approximately C\$30,000-40,000 annually; however, it is difficult to estimate staffing costs as they are no longer dedicated solely to the Civic Youth Engagement Policy.<sup>8</sup>

## **Outcomes and reflections**

### *Key results and achievements*

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Dang.

The main results of the policy have included:

*Greater awareness and appreciation of the value of youth participation in decision-making and policy development within the City and in the community*

Positive outcomes have resulted from involving youth in decision-making and policy development. These included creating greater awareness and appreciation of youth within the city and the community. For example, the City's Drug Policy Program described above involved young people in developing and implementing a strategy to prevent harmful drug use and promote safe and healthy communities. The project brought together the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Police Department, the University of British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver (Macpherson et al. 2006).

*Relatively vibrant youth-driven sector, with many youth-driven organizations receiving core City funding*

Encouraging a vibrant youth-driven sector, the City provides core funding for youth-related supports and programmes, including ethno-cultural, Aboriginal, street outreach, and LGBT youth workers. Additionally, the City of Vancouver initiated the Get Out Program, jointly managed by the Park Board, the Social Planning Department, and the Office of Cultural Affairs. With a budget of \$175,000, the programme assisted youth and youth-serving or community-based organizations through grants (between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per project) to develop, implement, and engage youth in sport, recreation, arts, or cultural activities (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a). The program ran from 2004-2006.

*Municipal youth civic leadership development and capacity-building programmes*

Through youth civic leadership development and capacity-building programmes, youth have become more engaged in civic processes. Youth Politik is an ongoing programme educating participants on important issues within the City. The programme builds leadership skills and gives youth direct experience in local governance, politics, and project development. Once participants complete the programme, they develop connections and are kept in contact with the City, possibly participating in other projects and decision-making processes in municipal government departments and the community (Vancouver Youth website 2010).

*Strengthened network among youth, youth-serving, and youth-driven organizations in Vancouver*

Many projects of the Civic Youth Strategy involved collaboration involving City departments, youth, and youth-serving and youth-driven organizations. The Youth Outreach Team helped support this network by acting as a bridge between City staff and youth community organizations. An example was the annual City of Vancouver Youth Awards, an initiative of the YOT, celebrating work being done by Vancouver's youth community. Awards were presented to youth aged 13-18, youth aged 19-24, adult allies, and youth groups and organizations (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a). The awards ceremony has been a popular event, providing opportunities for organizations and youth to network, appreciate, and learn about what was going on within the community.

*Higher than average eligible youth voter turnout in last municipal election (2008)*

The Civic Youth Strategy has focussed on creating awareness among youth regarding civic programmes and services, encouraging youth civic engagement. In response to the traditionally low youth turnout rate in municipal elections, in 2005, with input from the Youth Outreach Team, a youth election group was established to create and deliver skits, educating youth about civic programmes and services relating to their everyday lives (Blanchet-Cohen 2006a).

### *Young people more frequently engaged in municipal decision-making and policy development processes after adoption of the 1995 Strategy*

There has been an increase in young people's engagement in municipal decision-making and policy development. When departments were developing policies or making municipal decisions such as neighbourhood planning, the City requests participation from the Youth Politik alumni.

Youth involved with Civic Youth Strategy-focused programs have expressed that in their involvement they gained a wide range of experiences, including working in a team and an office environment, experience in planning processes, acquiring knowledge of city issues, making connections to other youth and diverse opportunities, and feeling a sense of ownership for their work. Youth reported that pride and ownership of their projects and a sense of being part of a team motivated them to stay involved, and to continue to make a difference in their community.<sup>9</sup> Some of these youth continue to be involved with youth initiatives in various ways, including when entering the 'adult world': this includes volunteering, internships, mentorships, and through collaborations between the City and other communities/departments, such as working as a staff in a neighbourhood house on youth-related issues while collaborating with the City. Although no studies have been done to evaluate the long-term impact of this policy, the key results and achievements of the CYS appear to promote continued youth engagement.

While the Civic Youth Strategy accomplished significant achievements and results, there are areas that still need to be addressed. A great amount of work has been done in the early childhood (0-5) and the 13-24 year age range, however, more focus on middle childhood and the younger youth age group (6-12 years of age) is needed.<sup>10</sup> With recent organizational changes, the Youth Outreach Team is no longer as directly involved in major youth initiatives in Vancouver, and there is a need for other departments to initiate youth programmes.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, there are major issues affecting youth in Vancouver that need addressing, including overall affordability and housing costs.<sup>12</sup>

### *Overall assessment and replicability or adaptation elsewhere*

It is unique within Canada to have a clear and dedicated municipal youth policy generating further initiatives, projects, and policies that is still being implemented after 15 years.<sup>13</sup> This policy has defined a transformation within the organization in terms of appreciating young people's contributions and acknowledging their right to be included in democratic decision-making and public constitution. The success of policy is reflected in the emergence and development of a rich fabric of youth-serving organizations and services, and youth-driven organizations.

In terms of outstanding challenges and limitations of the policy, with a diverse municipal government, it has been difficult to maintain corporate-wide awareness and dedicated resources, time, and effort towards the Civic Youth Strategy initiatives.<sup>14</sup> Another challenge is maintaining young people's engagement in municipal/local issues, and sustaining the capacity of the youth community. This is very much a function of aging as there is constant transition of 'children and youth'. Other challenges and limitations include: ensuring representation of all youth in Vancouver; engaging middle childhood and younger youth while developing the

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<sup>9</sup> Interviews with Jamie Castillon, 7 January 2011, Orlando Hee, 12 January 2011, and Sisco Orellana, 15 January 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Dang.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Törjék.

<sup>12</sup> Interviews with Anderson and Dang.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Dang

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Dang.

necessary tools to do so; and adjusting to organizational changes, while properly communicating these changes to all partners.<sup>15</sup>

On the basis of interviews of City staff and selected youth who had been involved in programs relating to the Civic Youth Strategy, it appears that the strategy has been successful in promoting civic youth engagement through collaborations involving City departments, youth-serving organizations, and youth-driven organizations. For example, youth involved in strategy initiatives had a very positive experience, feeling their participation was a valuable part of the civic process, and other youth were engaged through their efforts.<sup>16</sup> However, it is difficult to properly assess these successes as no measures of progress exist for the strategy.

Furthermore, it is difficult to measure the implications of the recent organizational changes that affect the amount of time and resources allocated to youth issues as no reviews have been conducted. City staff are still undergoing the transition themselves and learning the impacts of these changes in the process.

Lessons learned from implementing the Strategy<sup>17</sup> include:

- Youth engagement implementation is cost effective. The main cost is staff resources and time allocated to work towards implementing the Civic Youth Strategy.
- It is important to continuously refine tools and engagement methods to make them meaningful and connected to policy objectives.
- For most effective results, youth civic engagement and education has to be supported by all partners involved.
- For inclusive civic youth engagement effectiveness, attention to basic needs is needed, including housing, food, safety, and working with organizations and other levels of government that provide or work to support these needs.
- Needs and desires vary considerably among different youth groups, making it important to appreciate diversity amongst youth communities.
- It is important to establish clear expectations, goals, and communications for all partners involved.

### **Main obstacles**

The main obstacles have included (in no particular order)<sup>18</sup>:

1. Making the case corporately and among partner agencies for the value and practice of meaningful youth participation in decision-making and policy development.
2. Adequacy of staff capacity and resources to advocate for youth involvement and to assist in youth-friendly design of processes across the City structure.
3. Maintaining political and managerial commitment to the participation of young people.
4. Establishing benchmarks and measures of progress.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Dang.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Castillon, Hee, and Orellana.

<sup>17</sup> Interviews with Törjék and Dang.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Törjék and Dang.

## Replication or adaptation of policy elsewhere

This policy model was a response to organizational priorities and the capacity of those involved; a long-term commitment is still evolving and changing.

Recommendations to cities that want to formulate a similar Civic Youth Strategy:

- In developing the strategy, ensure that clear measurable goals and objectives are developed. Ongoing measurement of performance is key in justifying the importance of the strategy to key stakeholders.
- Ensure staff across City departments are supported and trained to deliver youth engagement initiatives, enhancing appreciation of young people's voices and differences in perspectives.
- Ensure project and programmes are put in place creating informed youth citizenry and helping build youth capacity.
- To encourage ongoing youth involvement, ensure successful youth-led initiatives.
- Recognize realistic timelines for building capacity for effective civic youth engagement.
- Build collaborative relationships between the youth community and the City.
- Establish clear expectations, goals, and communication to all partners involved.
- Set mechanisms for ongoing youth engagement efforts, acknowledging that there will always be new young people and diverse youth communities to engage.
- Outreaching to youth using the peer-to-peer approach, and going out to youth locations such as schools, community centers, and neighbourhood houses to connect to a more diverse youth population.
- Ensure opportunities for alumni involvement for the youth involved with civic engagement practices.

For transferring the Civic Youth Strategy model to other cities, an underlying culture of appreciating young people is necessary. Collaborative relationships between youth-serving and youth-driven organizations and the local government would be an asset.

In terms of obstacles replicating or adapting the policy, many municipalities with 'children and youth' policies in Canada, including the Civic Youth Strategy, have been signatory to the UN Convention to the Rights of Children. Re-capturing the same momentum triggered by the UN Convention might be a challenge.<sup>19</sup> The Vancouver Charter differs from other municipalities in Canada, resulting in other Cities not having the same government resources as the City of Vancouver to implement the Civic Youth Strategy. However, there is enough broadness to the policy that allows for agencies to interpret it based on constraints they may have. Lastly, implementation of the policy is dependent on all partners involved. If the partners involved in this case were not available and willing to participate – including the wealth of youth organizations in Vancouver – the outcomes would not have been the same.

Issues or elements of practice to be considered in view of adapting the practice in a different context include:

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Dang.

- Consider the diverse culture of public participation within the local governance environment;
- Look at the nature of public spaces and foster them to become child and youth friendly;
- Consider collaborative partnerships to be beneficial to the strategy;
- Identify aspects of the youth engagement continuum that are already being filled by the local government and other partner agencies;
- Identify who's role it is to provide needs that are not being filled; and
- Help set-up a process or system to put aspects of youth engagement in place.

It is also important to realize that resources will vary, and it will take a number of years to build capacity for an effective youth engagement model. Due to the large size and diverse demographic in Vancouver, this model was appropriate for the City. This may not be the case for other municipalities.<sup>20</sup>

## Further information

This case was researched and written by Sophie Daviau Dempsey under the supervision of Dr. Nancy Duxbury at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal, in 2010.

### UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights

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### **Interviews:**

Julianna Törjék, City of Vancouver, Planning Assistant, 6 December 2010, Vancouver.

Debbie Anderson Eng, City of Vancouver, Senior Social Planner, 8 December 2010, Vancouver.

Steven R. Dang, City of Vancouver, Social Planner, 8 December 2010, Vancouver.

Jamie Castillon, Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, Youth Programs Staff, 7 January 2011, Vancouver.

Orlando He, City of Vancouver, Youth Politik Program Participant, Programming Coordinator and Outreach Intern, 12 January 2011, Vancouver.

Sisco Orellana, City of Vancouver, Youth Politik Program Participant, Youth Politik Outreach and Vancouver Youth Website Intern, 15 January 2011, Vancouver.