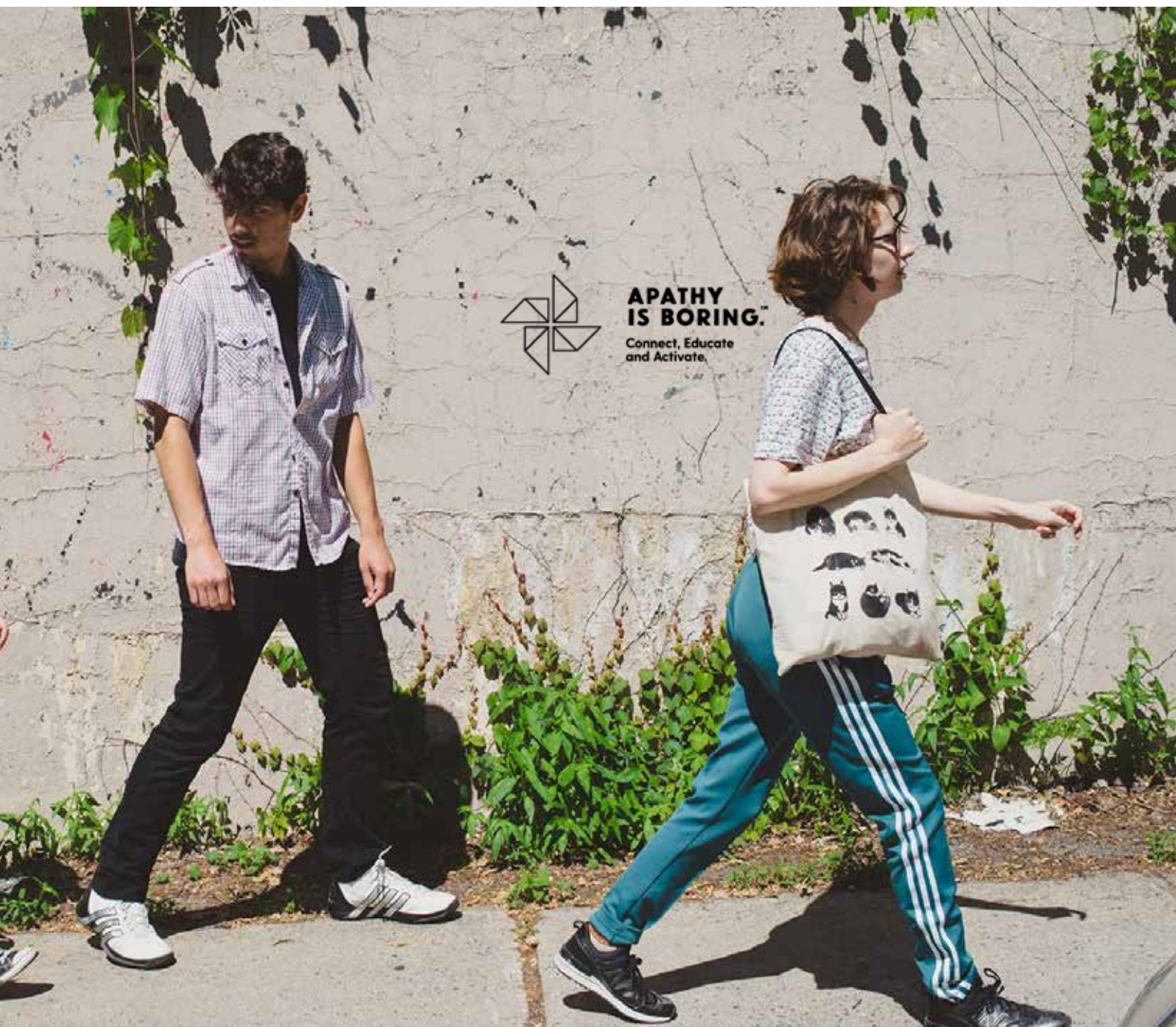# Together We Rise

Youth-led Democratic Innovation in Canada

Executive Summary

Even as technology has allowed civic participation in Canada to become easier, more widespread and more diverse, traditional institutions are increasingly perceived as unaccountable, exclusive and disengaging. Multiple studies have shown that Canadian youth, in particular, feel increasingly alienated by the democratic process. This is due to more than just barriers to political participation. Instead, young people are reacting to a more significant crisis of political culture and growing ever more disenchanted with formal modes of political participation despite having access to unprecedented networked and mobile media opportunities for expression and interaction.

Despite growing cynicism about our traditional democratic institutions' abilities to affect real change and increasing distrust of political decision-makers, youth are not declining to participate in our democracy. Instead, many are shifting to more unconventional forms of civic participation that draw on media, community engagement and cultural production to engage in new forms of political discourse. These community-based, non-institutional social movement-oriented forms of "self-actualizing citizenship" engagement are attracting youth in unprecedented numbers, disproving assumptions that young people are mostly opting out of our democracy.

Compiled by Apathy is Boring (AisB), a non-partisan charitable organization that has been promoting civic and democratic engagement in Canada since 2004, this report sets out to identify some of the root causes of young people's disenchantment with our formal political processes. The report provides a framework as to how youth can meaningfully participate in developing solutions to this crisis in political culture that affects them so profoundly through the introduction of youth-led democratic innovation.

To further support its initial findings, this report also includes a case study of one of Apathy is Boring's flagship programs, called RISE, that works to address the growing 'democratic deficit' among Canadian youth by offering opportunities for 18 to 30-year-olds to develop and activate community projects for 20 weeks in communities across Canada. Through this program, youth develop their skills, networks and creativity to activate projects or initiatives that feel meaningful to them and function to deepen youth participation in civic spaces.

RISE participants have the opportunity to successfully bridge 'youth service' and youth-led democratic innovation through engaging their peers in the process while changing their perspectives on power, employment prospects, educational and career goals. This shift in perception of their individual and collective power leads to a new sense of their efficacy as agents of change in their community.

Finally, this report provides recommendations for how youth-serving organizations, governments, public authorities and funders in Canada can support meaningful youth engagement. . Recommendations include how to facilitate better access to initiatives that serve disengaged, disadvantaged and marginalized communities of young people across the country.

Apathy is Boring
(A is B) is a pan-Canadian, non-partisan, youth-led charitable organization whose mission is to support and educate youth to be active and contributing citizens in Canada's democracy.

Authors:
Dr. Tara Mahoney   Samantha Reusch   Caro Loutfi

Youth engagement and political participation in Canada is changing.

Nowadays, building an app, starting a hashtag, becoming a vegan, boycotting or buycotting a product, planting a garden, throwing a street party, forwarding emails, yarn bombing, or attending a poetry slam can all be considered emerging forms of participatory 'do-it-yourself' citizenship if they are aimed at a specific issue or cause (Ratto & Boler, 2014). Networked and mobile media have created unprecedented opportunities for expression and interaction. Over the past 10 years, there has been a surge in unconventional forms of civic participation that draw on media, community engagement and cultural production to engage in new forms of political discourse.

01

"Through RBC Future Launch, we've made a longstanding commitment to work collaboratively with all stakeholders including government, educators and the public and private sectors, and most importantly – with young people, to drive change, co-create solutions and to break down the barriers young people often face when transitioning from school to work. The findings of this report reaffirm what we've believed all along, young people have the confidence, capabilities and inspiration to reimagine the way our country works and chart a more prosperous and inclusive future for us all. They want to be the change."

–Mark Beckles, Senior Director, Youth Strategy & Innovation, RBC

Key Findings

02

1

There is a crisis in Canadian political culture

This growing crisis of political culture is more than merely a lack of participation; it is a perception of distrust between the public and political decision-makers. Few Canadians have strong trust in political institutions such as Parliament (19%), political parties (10%) and the mass media (16%).

2

Young Canadians feel disconnected from the traditional political process

Youth's cynicism toward the political process is high, especially among marginalized populations. Additionally, employment and socio-economic outcomes can have a significant impact on the extent to which certain youth engage with civic and democratic institutions. Nearly three-quarters of them say that politics and government are too complicated to understand, while 61% say that they do not have a say about what the government does. Ultimately, this lack of trust is a crucial factor in the decline of youth participation in our political institutions.

3

Participation among young Canadians is shifting rather than declining

Despite youth's increasing disengagement from traditional Canadian political institutions, their participation in our broader political discourse is not declining. Instead, it is shifting as they deliberately choose to swap forms of participation that they see as deeply flawed for community-based, non-institutional and social movement-oriented forms of engagement that blur the line between private and public space. Often created by young people themselves, these new constructs exploit their familiarity with the power and reach of new media technologies.
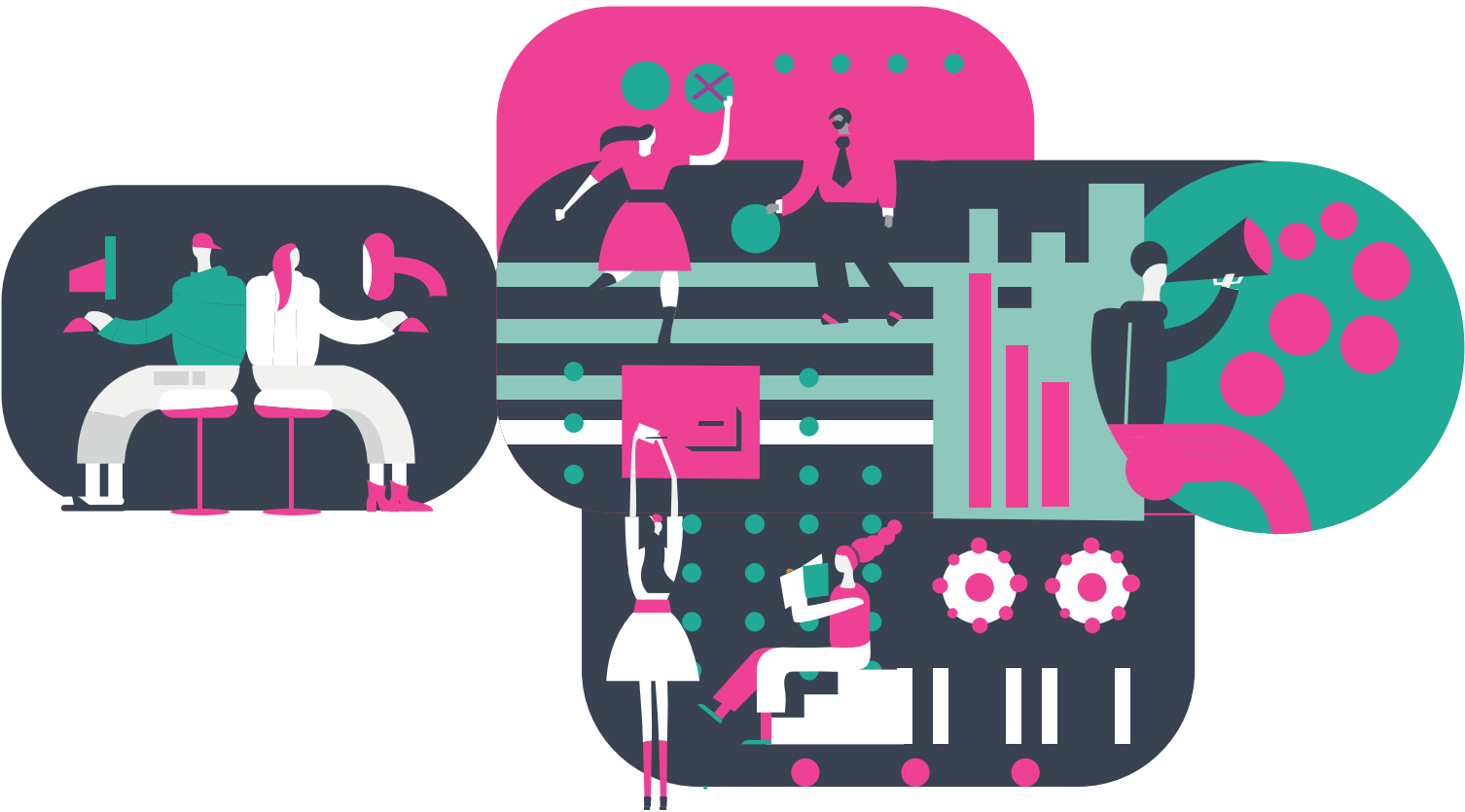
4

New opportunities are emerging through youth-led democratic innovation

Youth-led democratic innovation can be used not only as a framework to understand the ecosystem of youth political engagement and how it has shifted, it can also serve to underscore how involving youth in all aspects of decision making can begin to reverse the declining trend of youth engagement with institutions. There is a clear need for youth engagement frameworks that reflect the reality that young people are diverse, have different interests and will consequently develop different strategies to see their perspectives realized.

5

Empowering youth decision-making is the key to fostering meaningful engagement

Building programs that successfully employ youth-led democratic innovation requires a commitment to empowering youth decision-making as well as reinforcing the value of skills, experience and power of young people. Moreover, these programs need to allow youth to apply their unique skills, networks and creativity toward undertaking projects of their own design while also allowing for meaningful and substantive decisions where power is shared.

6

RISE successfully addresses key challenges to youth engagement

By offering opportunities for 18 to 30-year-olds in several Canadian cities to develop and run their own community projects over 20 weeks, RISE helps them develop valuable community engagement skills. Fully accountable to its participants, the program does not tokenize their participation. Instead, it helps build their confidence, allowing them to engage more fully with their peers on important issues, encouraging other youth to follow their example. Youth who feel that they have sufficient skills and training required to enter the workforce are also more likely to engage with civic and democratic institutions. RISE participants have stated that the program's emphasis on practical skills training enabled them to feel better prepared, which in turn improved their employment prospects while expanding their interests, career goals and ability to participate in civic and democratic spaces.

03

61% say people like them don't have a say about what the government does

58.8% 1988 and 2008, overall turnout in federal elections fell from 75.3 percent to 58.8 percent
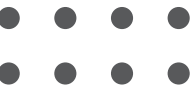
Political participation has become much easier,

more widespread and more diverse at a time when political institutions are increasingly perceived as unaccountable, exclusive and disengaging. Despite stereotypes about youth being lazy or uninformed, young Canadians are voicing their concerns and participating in social movements in unprecedented ways.

04

The problem is that despite the increased vibrancy and prevalence of youth civic and political participation, young people still remain largely disconnected from formal modes of participation (elections, political parties and institutional decision-making processes).

This disconnection risks hollowing out our democratic process and generating a void of public indifference with respect to our democratic institutions.

A key component of these shifting modes of participation is an examination of the additional barriers that youth today face in engaging with formal political channels, access to power and decision-making roles - both in a political context as in their daily lives. **Employment and socio-economic outcomes can have a significant impact on the extent to**

which certain youth engage with civic and democratic institutions (Zaff, Younis & Gibson, 2009). While youth who do not pursue higher education are disproportionately impacted by these barriers, even those who do attend a college or university encounter more challenges than previous generations in accessing the economic security that precludes an active civic life. Higher education alone is no longer sufficient in many cases for entry into the job market (Lamb & Doyle, 2017). Increasingly, youth are required to demonstrate work experience and soft skills in addition to academic or training qualifications in order to even be eligible for entry-level positions in their respective fields (Lamb & Doyle, 2017). Equipping youth with skills development opportunities, networks of support and relevant experience enables

youth to pursue economic opportunities effectively in addition to building power through civic and democratic engagement and leadership (Zaff, Younis & Gibson, 2009).

This report responds to the need for connecting informal youth participation with formal institutional power in ways that feel meaningful to participants and function to deepen youth participation with our democratic institutions. As a non-partisan, youth-led charitable organization that supports and educates youth to be active and contributing citizens in Canada's democracy, Apathy is Boring (A is B) knows intuitively that young people are leading a revolution in political culture. Since 2004, AisB has been reaching millions of young Canadians by merging youth culture and political participation.
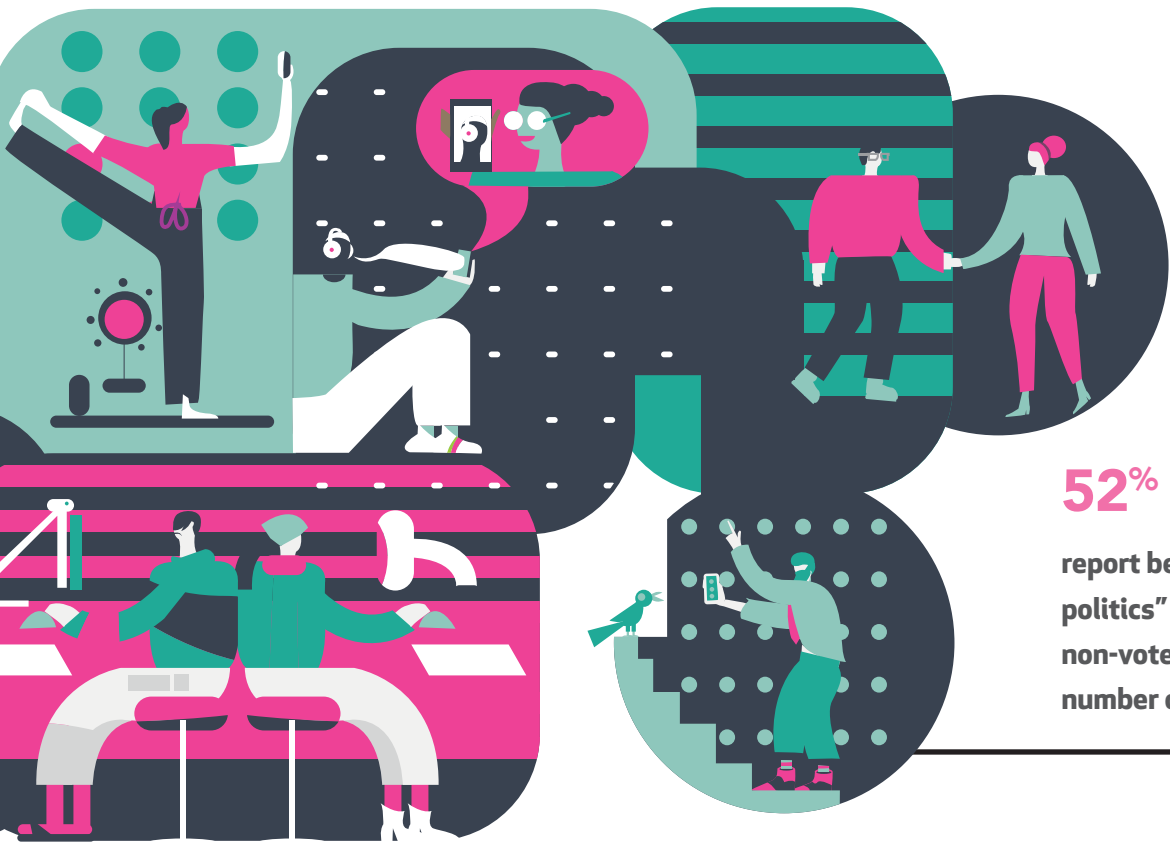
52%

report being "interested in politics" and when asked why non-voters did not vote, the number one reason is motivation

The aim of this report is to describe AisB's approach to youth engagement through the concept of 'youth-led democratic innovation', which combines individual action, grassroots community projects and large scale mobilization efforts with key partnerships with governmental institutions and civil society organizations. The report will unfold through the following sections:

→ *Contextualize the widespread retreat from institutional forms of political engagement in Canada and changing citizenship norms among youth in Western democracies (Section 1).*

→ *Define and explore the concept of 'youth-led democratic innovation' through the work of Apathy is Boring (Section 2).*

→ *Examine Apathy is Boring's RISE program as an evaluative case study of how to bridge 'youth service' with youth-led democratic innovation. This is explored through the impact of the program on participants both in the short-term*

(behaviours, shifts in perspective and power, skills, networks) as well as potential long term implications (shifts in employment prospects, educational and career goals, trajectory) (Section 3).

→ *Suggest recommendations for how youth-serving organizations, governments, public authorities, and funders can support youth-led democratic innovation, including how to better facilitate access to initiatives that serve disengaged, disadvantaged or marginalized communities of young people in Canada (Section 4).*

SECTION

01

Changing Modes of Civic and Political Participation

Disengagement with
Political Institutions in Canada

Across demographics, engagement with institutional and formal modes of political participation in Canada are in decline, with these numbers particularly high among young people. Using voter turnout as an indicator, we can observe that between 1988 and 2008, turnout in federal elections fell from 75.3 percent to 58.8 percent (Elections Canada, 2016).

And while the national turnout rate rose in 2011 to 61.1 percent and to 68.3 percent in 2015, recent findings from Abacus Data suggest that many youth "don't see the relevance of political parties or elections to their daily lives" (2019). Despite this significant increase in turnout at the federal level, there is much to suggest this is not translating into an increased motivation to engage with the formal political system, despite caring deeply about a variety of issues. Trust is a crucial factor in the decline of participation with political institutions. Looking at the population at large, a 2018 study found that few Canadians have strong trust in political institutions such as Parliament (19%), political parties (10%) and the mass media (16%) (Environics, 2017a).

Young citizens are at the heart of what many observers deem to be a 'crisis

of representative democracy'. Abacus Data (2019) polls additionally found that distrust of institutions is present in youth population as well. The report describes how among people aged 15-30 there is:

"a strong sense of disconnect between government and citizens: youth feel that when the average citizen speaks the government doesn't listen, and when the government speaks, the average citizen doesn't understand. Nearly three-quarters of youth say politics and government are too complicated to understand what is going on. And 61% say people like them don't have a say about what the government does".

According to a recent study commissioned by Elections Canada, cynicism among youth is high, especially among those who are often marginalized – women, those with an annual income

of less than $40,000, those without a post-secondary education, those who are unemployed, those that speak French as a first language, are Indigenous, are part of a visible minority, were born outside of Canada, are disabled, or who live in a rural area or in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario or Alberta (Manoliu & Sullivan, 2016). The Canadian Millennial Social Values Study revealed that most young people follow news and current events at least daily if not more frequently, and significant proportions pay attention to politics at the local, national and international levels. Despite this, only 52% report being "interested in politics" and when asked why non-voters did not vote, the number one reason is motivation (Environics, 2017b).

Established explanations for the youth political disengagement typically hinge on demographic and social barriers such as education, age, income, gender, ethnicity and immigrant status (Uppal & LaRochelle-Côté, 2016; Howe, 2011; Painter-Main, 2014), Other common accounts include the idea that non-voters lack a sense of civic duty and are less likely to be interested in or informed
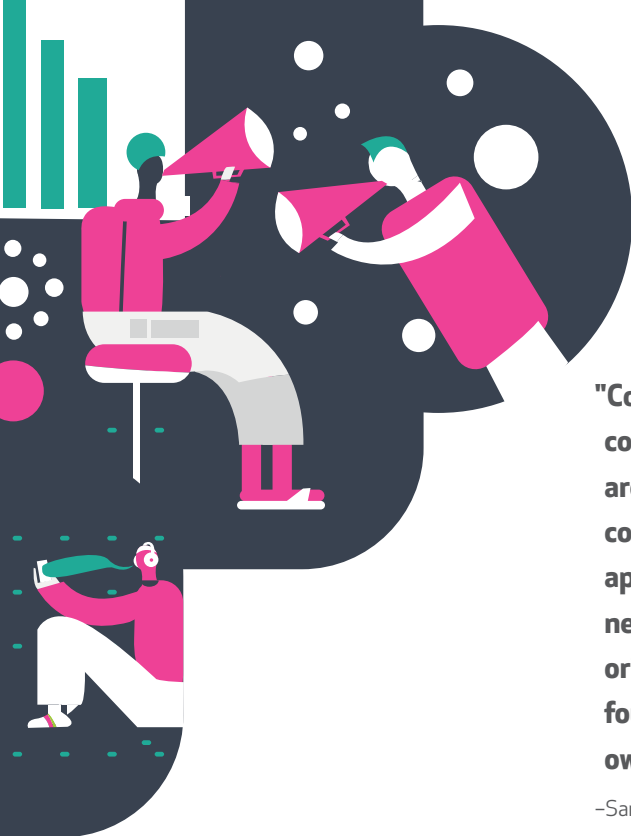
"Community foundations across the country strive to create communities that are supportive and inclusive of youth and that are open to their leadership and innovative capacity. This report contributes to dispelling myths about youth disengagement and apathy, and brings forward a sophisticated and helpful analysis of how new forms of action and leadership have emerged. Fueling our strong orientation towards the future, these insights will help community foundations, along with other civil society institutions, to refine our own knowledge and practices, to be part of closing the gap."

–Sara Lyons, Community Foundations of Canada

07

about political affairs (Howe, 2011; Milner, 2010; Wattenberg, 2008). However, scholars associated with the 'anti-apathy' paradigm (Dalton, 2007, 2008; Phelps, 2012; Norris, 2011; Klingemann, 2015) have emphasized the point that young people have an interest in politics but feel alienated from the democratic process. This sentiment is reflected in a Canadian study (Bastedo et al., 2014) that found rather than being uninformed and apathetic, certain politically unengaged people had definite views on politics and democracy but felt powerless and ignored when they interacted with the political system. The authors describe a common mantra of 'democracy is great; it's politics I hate' that was repeatedly expressed by the study's participants (Bastedo et al., 2014).

Given these trends, numerous observers have suggested Canada suffers from a 'democratic deficit' (Warren, 2009) where there is "a widespread sense among voters…that the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy – political parties, elections, and territorially based legislatures – are simply not up to the task of articulating or defending the interests of the vast majority of citizens in the current age" (Lenard & Simeon, 2012: 223).

This evidence suggests that the democratic deficit is about more than barriers to participation. Rather it is a crisis of political culture – a breakdown in the norms that drive democratic participation and widespread perception of distrust between the public and political decision makers.

Changing Norms and Values

While young people seem to be rejecting formal politics, they are increasingly opting for community-based, non-institutional and social movement-oriented forms of engagement (Norris, 2011; Klingemann, 2015; Hooghe & Oser, 2015). There is a growing consensus among researchers that the norms and values associated with civic and political participation are changing rather than declining. Youth engagement scholar Peter Levine (2008) argues that conventional narratives of youth disengagement treat a withdrawal from major institutions (such as elections and political parties) as a sign of apathy or lack of education, when these trends may actually reflect growing sophistication where young people are deliberately choosing not to endorse forms of participation that they see as deeply flawed.

Lance Bennett (2008) describes how social, cultural and political shifts have resulted in younger generations moving away from institutionally driven "dutiful citizenship" and toward "self-actualizing citizenship". For the self-actualizing citizen, politics is understood as a broader set of concerns—from identity politics to community organizing—and is often motivated by a sense of individual purpose and personal expression rather than obligation to government. Numerous studies show the growing popularity of these 'actualizing' forms of civic or political participation across Western societies such as Australia (Martin, 2012), the United States (Dalton, 2008), the United Kingdom (Phelps, 2012), Germany (Busse et. al, 2015), Canada (Raney & Berdahl, 2009) and in other European countries (Sloam, 2013). These trends have led media theorist Ethan Zuckerman

(2014) to suggest that new forms of civic and political engagement could signal a deeper ideological shift towards "post-representative democracy," in which political participation relies on theories of change beyond influencing representative governments, and aimed instead at shifting systems of power through culture, communication, and everyday life.

Old vs. New Approaches to Youth Engagement

In light of these changes in citizenship norms, organizations and governments must shift their youth engagement strategies. Traditional approaches to youth engagement with formal politics and policy are typically enacted through hierarchical institutions and long-term engagement. Such forms are likely to employ the 'youth development model' where youth are seen as being in a transitional stage and participation is mainly about young people learning to become active citizens rather than being seen as actors in the here and now. Within this older paradigm, young people are conceived as subjects that need to be guided, monitored and controlled (Bacalso, 2016; Crowley & Moxon, 2017). Traditional participation is thus associated with formal settings that have been established by adults, where young people are 'invited' to join hierarchically organized processes with already established rules of engagement (Bacalso, 2016; Cornwall, 2009).

In contrast, Bacalso (2016) describes how emerging forms of youth engagement are characterized by "informality, issue-based goals, and intermittent and micro-level engagement". These new forms of youth participation are typically more 'popular' (as opposed to 'invited'). They are more likely to blur the line between public and private space, and often are claimed or created by young people themselves. These practices of youth participation draw on the affordances of new media and can range from media production

"Apathy is Boring's work on youth-led innovation provides extremely valuable insights into how to structure an impactful program that will actually affect the way young people think about themselves as agents of change. AisB's rigorous and systematic approach in the design, implementation, and evaluation of its RISE is refreshing, and a model of best practices for any organization seeking to build capacity and understanding of social and democratic engagement."

–Dr. Daniel Savas, SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

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(citizen journalism, podcasting, video production, graphic design) and art projects (public art, theatre, music, visual art), to tech-based activities (building apps, websites, and computers), community organizing (organizing, boycotting, petitions, hacking, digital campaigns), social enterprise (producing goods and services) and lifestyle politics (vegetarianism, localism, buycotting) (Ratto & Boler, 2014; Gordon & Mihailidis, 2016; Jenkins et. al, 2016).

There is compelling evidence that these forms of participation are taking hold among youth in Western democracies. Perhaps the most striking example in recent history is the youth-led movement against gun violence in the United States which erupted after a gunman opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killing seventeen students and staff members in February 2018. The Parkland students who lead the #NeverAgain movement focused not only on motivating their peers, organizing networks and changing decision-making among elected politicians but also on making clear how the gun lobby funds political campaigns as well as mainstream media organizations. The students were successful in getting gun law reform at both the state and federal level (Wikipedia contributors, 2019).

In a Canadian example, Mahoney (2017) documents a rich "ecology of peer-to-peer political engagement" that arose leading up to the 2015 federal election. She documents how projects like Vote Savvy, Be the Vote, Right to Vote, 31 Reasons, and Voting Buddies used photography, short videos, graphic design, hashtags, and social media as a form of peer-to-peer engagement where young people encouraged each other to vote and taught each other how to cast a ballot and how to organize in-person events. Other efforts included Drake the Vote, which amassed 8,597 signatures calling on hip-hop musician Drake to make a PSA about voting. Projects such as Strategicvoting. ca, voteswap.ca, iSideWith.com, votes. mp, Pollenize, and I CAN Party drew on data analysis to help people decide which candidates most aligned with their values. Mobile application Vote Note used GPS technology to pinpoint riding districts for voters, providing them with information about candidates, polling station locations, and a clock that counted down to election day.

These examples illustrate how youth-instigated civic and democratic participation can facilitate new forms of peer-to-peer motivation and agency. They also demonstrate how the decision-making processes involved in creating something can reveal new opportunities for civic and political participation—

even within traditional political processes like federal elections. Indeed, these examples show how creativity, collaboration and experimentation change our everyday map of democratic participation—its topics, practices, subjects, and values. However, in order to be politically meaningful, new forms of political and civic participation must be connected to institutional and collective forms of power.

It is clear there is a need for youth engagement frameworks that reflect the reality that young people are diverse and have different interests—as such they will develop different strategies to see their perspectives realized. **What is important is that youth engagement efforts connect the participatory activities of youth to structures of institutional power and decision-making.**

Despite much talk of the importance of youth engagement, there are few youth-led programs that leverage youth culture in ways that underscore the role of power and government in shaping social conditions. This is the case despite the urgency to develop new ideas that address younger generations, whose retreat from traditional methods of public participation threatens the legitimacy of formal democratic institutions.

09

SECTION

02

Youth-led Democratic Innovation

What is Youth-led Democratic Innovation?

In their article Wired for Innovation: Valuing the Unique Innovation Abilities of Emerging Adults, Dougherty & Clarke (2017) argue that the developing nature of the cognitive qualities of young people gives them unique access to "innovation potential".

Drawing on research in neuroscience and developmental psychology, they show how people between 15 and 25 years of age display characteristics that are conducive to innovation such as being collaborative, creative, observant, curious, action-oriented and visionary. More than older generations, young people are willing to experiment, take risks and challenge the status quo. Because of their innovation potential, when young people are meaningfully engaged, society is more likely to find solutions needed to tackle social, environmental, and economic challenges. Dougherty & Clarke make a strong case that we must recognize the unique abilities that young people possess while they are young and give them the opportunity to apply these abilities in a context that will have the potential for meaningful impact.

A London School of Economics and Political Science research study (2013) explored the motivations young people

have for participating and found that young people's motivation to participate comes from:

→ **Proximity to an event or value or idea** – *many younger teenagers may find it easier to get motivated regarding concerns that are real, material and immediate while some older teenagers from more educated or more engaged backgrounds may find it easier to relate to issues that are abstract or global. It is therefore easier to support youth democratic participation when both types of issues are addressed in political debates.*

→ **Being listened to by decision makers** - *Having decision makers listen to and act on young people's concerns and opinions and seeing the positive outcomes of these actions on local, social and individual contexts over a period of time.*

→ **Acting together with others** - *realizing that one has efficacy to change local things (building skateparks, preventing demolition of a youth club).*

Drawing on this study and the work of Dougherty & Clarke, 'youth-led democratic' can be defined as:

An approach to youth engagement that creates space for youth to lead through a combination of empowering roles.
By avoiding an exclusive focus on influencing elite decision-makers and rigid binary distinctions between conventional versus unconventional or formal versus informal, youth-led democratic innovation conceives of youth participation as an emergent, empowered and creative process that moves along a spectrum between different forms and intensities of engagement.

Key Modes of Youth-led Democratic Innovation

1. Youth-as-Movement Leaders

This mode creates for young people to instigate andparticipate in collective action as a way of developing strong and lasting political identities. It creates space for young people to instigate public debate and dialogue about a social issue or decision-making process. It often takes the form of digital participation where the Internet, social media and mobile technology are used to inform young people about social issues or how to participate. Examples include grassroots and decentralized movements with strong youth leadership like the Parkland students who lead the #NeverAgain movement, Black Lives Matter, and the student #climatestrikes.

2. Youth-as-creative organizers

This mode creates space for young people to use their skills, networks, and creativity toward civic and political projects of their own design. By deciding what issues to focus on and developing projects that address those issues, this approach creates opportunities for youth to learn about civic and political leadership through practice.

This includes youth-led projects as well as organizations in addition to co-management and co-production, where young people and adults jointly develop these initiatives.

3. Youth-as-decision makers

This mode creates space for young people to make meaningful and substantive decisions that affect themselves, their peers and their communities. Crucially, this requires a shift in dynamics between youth and adults from a relationship of "guidance, support and resources" to one where "power is shared, mutual, and reciprocal" (Tanner & Arnett, 2009: 40). This mode recognizes young people as a legitimate and powerful constituency, which involves influencing outcomes of elections through voting as well as more concentrated decision-making opportunities including youth councils, youth as elected officials and youth boards.

These modes of youth-led democratic innovation are consistent with the framework established by Julie Battilana and Marissa Kimsey (2017). This framework establishes three roles fundamental to movements for

social change: Agitators, Innovators and Orchestrators. "An agitator brings the grievances of specific individuals or groups to the forefront of public awareness. An innovator creates an actionable solution to address these grievances. And an orchestrator coordinates action across groups, organizations, and sectors to scale the proposed solution." In order to develop a true ecosystem of youth-led democratic innovation, it is required that youth be meaningfully engaged in all modes to the degree that they hold power within our democracy and are able to realize change in a broad manner.

Youth-led democratic innovation marks a shift from seeing youth engagement as a vertical 'ladder of engagement' to seeing it an ecology of roles and actions. The 'ladder' framework (Arnstein, 1969; Ruesga & Knight, 2013) has been widely adopted by engagement organizations and practitioners as a key model of bringing unengaged individuals into a campaign or cause with the goal of building power by moving them 'up the ladder' through low-barrier actions have a 'spillover' effect that trigger higher intensity actions (Cantijoch et. al, 2016).

12

While the ladder framework is useful for thinking about youth engagement strategies and tactics (especially when it comes to Internet-based participation), its hierarchical structure implies that elite-centred modes of participation are of highest value and priority. This positioning protects the power positions of already-privileged actors and positions more alternative and informal modes of participation as less desirable. Because entry points to civic engagement can exist anywhere, ladder models do not accurately represent the complexities of how young people participate in civic and political issues.

Youth-led democratic innovation accounts for how youth participation is multi-layered and dynamic; it changes over time in response to contexts and culture. One does not necessarily start at a 'low barrier' action and move up the ladder to a 'high barrier' action. Rather, young people draw on multiple forms of participation to yield different outcomes, depending on the context – participation might be intense and 'high-barrier' for

one issue but minimal and 'low-barrier' for another. For instance, a campaign for an important policy change directed at an elected official might only require that many people sign a petition or write a letter to a politician, but creating a video and hosting a dialogue about how racialized youth are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system in Canada requires months of commitment. One form of participation is not superior to the other; both are potential entry points into democratic participation.

In contrast to the ladder, youth-led democratic innovation provides the fluidity and flexibility necessary to account for not only the unconventional ways young people are choosing to participate in their communities but also for understanding how young people might engage with democratic institutions more intentionally and effectively. Therefore, rather than have a participant move 'up the ladder' action-by-action, A is B creates networks and builds capacity so participants can engage at multiple levels and intensities

that they deem appropriate. This framework allows A is B to respond to the dynamic nature of youth culture and build grassroots power both outside and inside institutional structures.

Apathy is Boring & Youth-led Democratic Innovation

As an explicitly 'youth-led' organization, the executive director, staff, volunteers and several board members are young people themselves who collectively participate in the visioning processes and contribute directly to the governance and programming of A is B. The organization is funded through a combination of foundation support, individual donations, revenue from its workshops and consulting services, and Government (Apathy is Boring, 2017). With a mission to reach under-engaged Canadians aged 18–35 and facilitate their participation in democratic life, A is B has been reaching millions of young Canadians through four integrated initiatives (Reach, Rise, Vote and Youth Friendly).
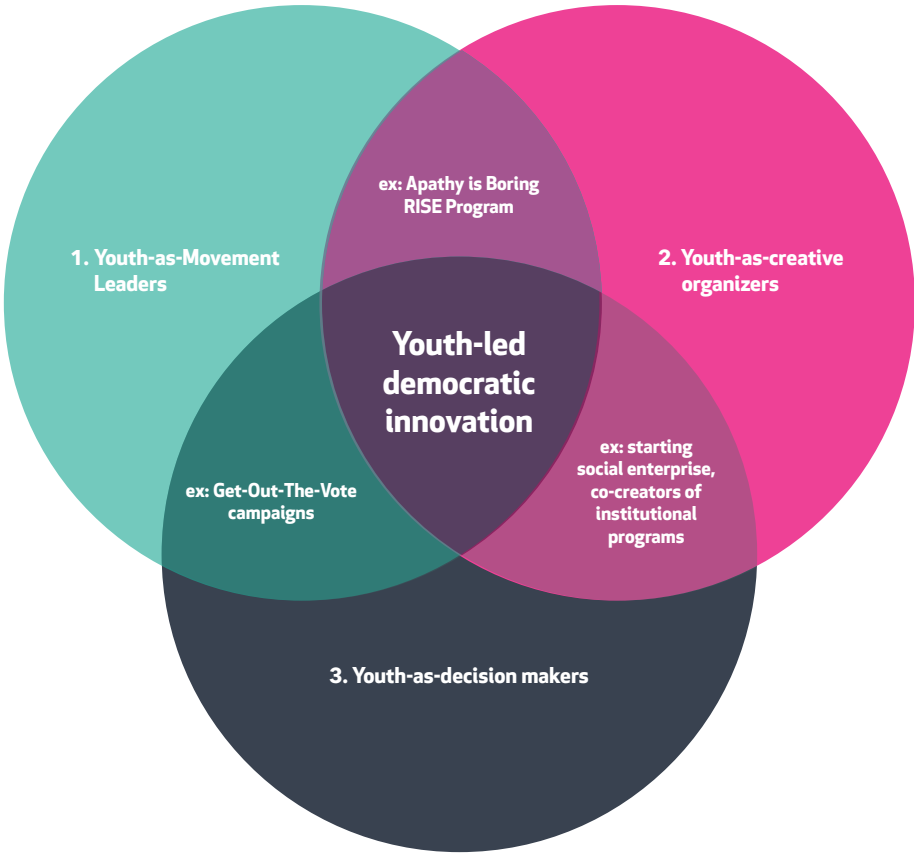
"By blending academic research, real-time case studies and direct experience, [the authors] expertly describe the key questions, emerging trends, and the dramatically changing landscape of youth engagement. A must-read for anyone scaling a systems change approach to building democracy from the ground-up. "Together We Rise" is your ticket to the revolution."

–Chad Lubelsky, McConnell Foundation

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An approach to youth engagement that creates space for youth to lead through a combination of empowering roles.

1. Youth-as-Movement Leaders

ex: Apathy is Boring RISE Program

2. Youth-as-creative organizers

Youth-led democratic innovation

ex: Get-Out-The-Vote campaigns

ex: starting social enterprise, co-creators of institutional programs

3. Youth-as-decision makers

A is B's methodology for developing programs draws on research, experimentation, partnerships and iteration. For instance, when a program or project is being considered, A is B first consults with both practitioners and researchers to analyze the issue being addressed by the initiative and identify where A is B can have an impact. If it is determined that the initiative should go ahead, A is B consults with its community to ensure it is addressing expressed needs and to determine whether it is relevant to an evolving youth culture. Once the initiative is up and running, A is B gathers program-level and strategic-level data to evaluate its performance. Ideas are tested and the initiative is refined based on feedback from participants and stakeholders. If the initiative is deemed successful, it is either built upon or shared with other youth engagement stakeholders. Through the four program areas, young people are invited to participate in individual action, local-level grassroots community projects and large scale mobilization efforts. Importantly, these initiatives work alongside key partnerships within the institutional ecosystem of governmental and civil society organizations.

Harm of tokenistic participation

When discussing ways to facilitate youth-led democratic innovation, it is important to acknowledge how youth engagement often functions in highly tokenistic terms. Although conventional youth engagement efforts typically centre narratives of youth voice, empowerment, and participation, they tend to eclipse deeper examinations of youth social exclusions and inclusions (Bessant, 2003; Kwon, 2013). This often results in disrespectful and tokenistic methods of youth inclusion that end up alienating youth and ultimately have the counter-productive outcome of deepening cynicism and deterring civic engagement. As Benard (2016) points out in her study

of youth engagement policy in Ontario, tokenistic approaches often hurt marginalized and racialized youth most. These young people participate in good faith, often sharing painful experiences of marginalization, but often do not see their input included in decision-making. This leaves them feeling more disempowered and reaffirms their sense that their voices do not matter and no real change can occur. In other words, tokenistic participation is not only an ineffective youth engagement strategy, it is harmful to youth empowerment.

There is often an assumption that facilitating 'youth voice' within decision-making processes will necessarily have an influence on decisions. This is a false assumption. What often happens is institutional stakeholders give space for the youth to share their viewpoints but without any real accountability that their feedback and ideas will be implemented. Bessant (2003) argues policy documents promote youth voice in decision-making but the manner in which their voices influence change goes unquestioned (Benard, 2016). Due to this lack of accountability, it is crucial that youth develop their capacity as critical thinkers and movement leaders so as to build their collective power in order to demand that their perspective be included in decision-making.

Social Justice Lens

Youth-led innovation requires acknowledging the structural oppressions experienced by young people, and working with youth to understand their own notions of participation. As such, efforts to facilitate youth-led democratic innovation must be conscious of the complex social, economic, and political forces that bear on the lives of youth, particularly young people who struggle with issues of identity, homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, police brutality, and poverty.

Scholar Naomi Nichols (2015) argues that youth benefit from opportunities to identify and address systemic inequalities that negatively impact their communities and themselves:

Some youth grow up with plenty of economic resources, a safe place to live and play, proper medical care, enough healthy food to eat, and opportunities for physical and cultural development through the arts, sports, and recreation. In many instances, these are also youth whose cultural ways of knowing and being are reflected in – and rewarded by – our dominant institutions (e.g., schools, labour market, political sphere). In contrast, other youth grow up experiencing discrimination, not enough economic resources, unstable or unsafe housing, not enough healthy food, few opportunities to engage in organized sports, arts and culture, or recreation opportunities, and difficulties fully accessing our province's public resources (e.g., healthcare and education). These youth experience multiple and compounding disadvantages that influence how they grow and develop.

Given the structural inequalities that permeate Canadian society, youth-led democratic innovation supports young people in dealing with systemic problems by experimenting and generating unique ways to contend with larger political forces. A social justice framework can account for the multiple forms of oppression youth encounter and offer strategies youth can use to address inequities plaguing their communities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). An explicit orientation to the multiple forms of (dis)advantage that influence the life experiences of young people acknowledges their social context and positions them as capable of identifying and addressing systemic discrimination.

SECTION

03

RISE Program: Case Study

The following section is a summary of the evaluation research conducted to assess the impact of the RISE program. RISE provides opportunities to youth 18 to 30 years old to develop and activate on a community project over a period of 20 weeks. The program is currently active in Montreal, Ottawa, Edmonton, Toronto, and Nunavut with plans to expand to Vancouver, Winnipeg and Halifax by February of 2020.

Projects developed in the first and second cohort were built around the theme of "social inclusion". Each hub identified a need locally and developed their projects as interventions meant to engage their less engaged peers and educate their communities around a need that they identified in consultation with their communities and local stakeholders. For more details on Ambassador projects, see Appendix A.

Structure of the RISE Program

The hub communities consist of a core group of about seven volunteer ambassadors who commit to the full 20 weeks of the program and meet weekly for three-hour sessions with their local Hub Coordinator (a staff member of A is B). The ambassadors commit to an

average of three additional hours of work weekly throughout the program for project work. The ambassadors are responsible for the co-creation of their community project as well as its promotion and implementation. Each project, once designed, must engage a number of youth organizers to assist in the execution phase. Additionally, the project is supported by a community network, consisting of organizations currently working on related issues who meet regularly to provide guidance and best practices as well as a local context during the project development process.

The curriculum of the RISE program includes three main components: the project development and ideation phase, the project planning and execution phase, and the evaluations and story-telling phase. During the project development

phase, ambassadors are introduced to broad concepts and undergo skills training simultaneously in order to prepare them for the development of a project idea relevant to the predetermined theme. Subsequently, once a project idea has been selected, ambassadors work together to plan out and execute their project idea with input and support from additional volunteers, community consultations, partner organizations as well as mentors. Finally, after the project implementation, ambassadors reflect on their experience, evaluate the successes and lessons learned from their project and document key insights and actionable advice for subsequent cohorts.

Using a set of key performance indicators (KPIs), the aim of the evaluation is to determine the degree to which the RISE
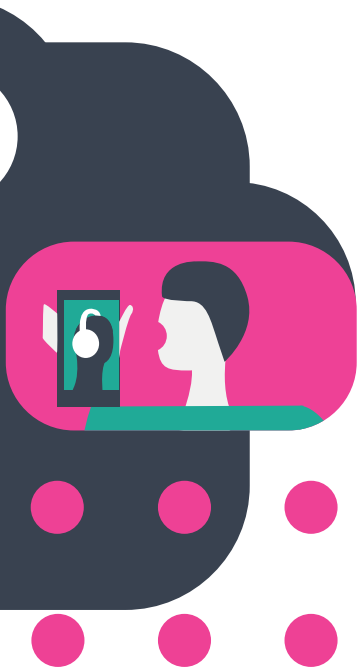
"Your model and the RISE program live in the world of 'emergence' and of 'unknown unknowns'. The RISE program allows youth to live in these worlds and develop the skill sets to manage the complexity. Humans don't naturally handle complexity well, they attempt to simplify it when it emerges. The 21st century is going to be even more complex so I would argue that the RISE program is building 21st century skills. These are the skills that the future economy and democratic citizens will need to navigate the current and future economy and political system."

–Sharif Mahdy, The Students Commission of Canada

program is able to build the capacity of and networks for youth to engage within their communities around issues that are important to them. The KPIs aim to measure the success of the programming in the following areas: (1) skills development and capacity building, (2) sense of power (3) understanding of positionality and systems-level change, (4) behaviour change (via the spectrum of engagement) and (5) network development (at personal and community levels). For more details on the KPI methodology, see Appendix B. The overarching goal is to create a network of young engaged changemakers that will continue to grow organically after the program has been completed.

Research outcomes

1. Skill-development and Capacity Building

"[RISE] taught me new skills on how I can organize events and network with other people who are interested in making a difference as well. I know it's possible to accomplish the things I want to accomplish now because of this program."
-Ambassador (Edmonton)

Key findings:
→ *All ambassadors across both cohorts acknowledge that they developed skills in at least one of the skill areas and almost all (95%) felt they had developed in two or more areas. In both cohorts, ambassadors reported communications skills and personal skills were two of the strongest performing categories, with professional skills as the lowest performing.*

→ *Personal skills development included, for many ambassadors, a discovery or refining of interests, particularly as they related to future goals or career paths. In cases where ambassadors did report this shift in career goals or personal trajectory as a result of the program, they reported an increased sense of preparedness for that path as a result of the program.*

→ *85% of Ambassadors in the second cohort agreed that they felt more prepared for the workforce after participating in RISE.*

→ *Ambassadors expressed a newfound appreciation for soft skills and the ability to manage a group dynamic in which their peers each brought varying levels of experience and existing skills to the group.*

→ *In a departure from the first cohort, ambassadors in cohort two reported that they have developed networking skills at a high rate, which reflects positively on changes made to the curriculum between cohort 1 and cohort 2.*

→ *Ambassadors experienced a significant positive shift in their sense of their ability to act on issues that are important to them locally in their city as well as at the provincial level.*

→ *Program activities led to a positive shift in confidence in the ability of Ambassadors to participate meaningfully in their communities on a day-to-day basis and to assess and then act on needs that they observe in their community.*

→ *Ambassadors reported a positive shift in their confidence in networking, communication and organizing specifically, as a result of the process. They credit this to a shift in their knowledge base and a function of practice and positive reinforcement through the process of conducting outreach around their projects.*

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"What resonated with me in this report and the work Apathy is Boring is doing is identifying the critical shift needed by 'the establishment' to assume a servant leadership role in supporting and empowering diverse and inclusive youth engagement. As well as the significance in appreciating an ecology of roles and actions well beyond the simple 'ladder'."

–James Bartram, OceanWise

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Summary:
The sense of "supported" independence developed through the program design created a safe space to exercise creativity and develop skills in addition to increasing opportunity for peer-to-peer community engagement. In interviews, participants described the program as having given them a controlled space through which they could develop skills necessary to engage within their communities, build their confidence and create opportunities for their peers to engage. Ambassadors shared that they were put in situations where they would have previously been outside their comfort zone. They experienced a sense of pride in having worked through those challenges and expressed having developed various skills as a result. One ambassador described:

"I definitely gained skills, like leadership skills and teamwork skills and communication skills....doing things you're not so comfortable doing, like speak[ing] in front of a crowd or a group of participants that you don't know is not easy but you learn."
(Ambassador, Montreal)

The development of these skills additionally led ambassadors to conclude that they were better prepared for the workforce than prior to the program. The program provided practical experience which is easily translated into increased civic engagement as well as improved employment prospects, a refining of interests and career goals.

2. Sense of Power
"RISE taught me so much about myself and made me believe in myself and that I / my voice was relevant".
(Ambassador, Montreal)

→ *Ambassadors expressed a positive shift in their sense of their place within their broader communities. They are significantly more likely to look for ways that they can contribute to their communities on a day-to-day basis. As one ambassador described, after participating in RISE they feel empowered to "create change and lead it".*

→ *Shifts in identity were expressed by ambassadors, who reported that RISE helped them see the value in youth perspectives and the integral role youth play in creating positive change in their communities.*

→ *Ambassadors affirmed a desire to continue with community service and collective efforts, prioritizing youth-led work and empowering other youth to take on leadership roles in their own network. Many additionally expressed a desire to pursue careers or higher education opportunities aligned with those goals, others expressed a desire to integrate those values and the knowledge gained into their ongoing work.*

→ *Ambassadors' confidence in their ability to create opportunities for others to work on issues they care about shifted positively. However, in some cases, there remained a gap between this result and their confidence in taking the initiative to develop their own project. In these cases, results demonstrated that ambassadors' confidence in their ability to take full leadership positions was still emerging. Ambassadors did not yet feel they had the confidence to take complete ownership from ideation to execution and preferred to work as part of a collective in order to supplement their own skills.*

Summary:
Ambassadors felt that youth have their own role to play in making positive change, both as individuals or collectively. When interviewed, ambassadors viewed their projects as part of a long-term strategy to engage and activate more of their peers. Through impacting a number of their less-engaged peers, they saw their work as potentially creating a "ripple effect" that would positively impact their peers and, ultimately, their communities. This is reflective of a key shift in perception –– a new sense of their own ability and the ability of their peers to contribute meaningfully.

This shift in perception of their individual and collective power has led to a new sense of their own efficacy as agents of change in their community. Ambassadors revealed a new sense of clarity and confidence as well as an increase in the value placed on their role as young people in both the new spaces opened to them as a result of their participation in RISE and other aspects of their lives such as social networks, workplaces and schools.

3. Understanding of Positionality
"Apathy really is boring... In order to create change and make change, we have to hold our elected officials accountable." (Ambassador, Toronto)

"It's important to acknowledge societal institutions that hinder different groups to attain equal opportunities. While community engagement and democratic involvement contribute to change, we need to address different systems of oppression for change." (Ambassador, Edmonton).

Key Findings:
→ *Ambassadors believe a partnership between institutions and civil society is a powerful mechanism for change and view the government as an important partner. They reported a clear need for youth-led organizations to bridge youth with the governmental institutions and programs.*

→ *Ambassadors largely view electoral participation as a tool for enacting change that is a part of a larger spectrum of engagement to hold elected representatives accountable and ensure that progress is ongoing on issues they care about.*

→ *Ambassadors identified systemic and structural barriers to meaningful democratic participation for their peers and communities. They felt that these barriers, along with the issue of representation of marginalized groups in formal political spaces, devalue electoral processes in Canada.*

→ *Ambassadors identify the financial support of governments in community-led interventions (with a focus on youth and marginalized groups) as the primary role of government in facilitating change on issues that concern them.*

→ *Many ambassadors identify broad cultural shifts and processes around community consultation and grassroots collaboration as key components of sustainable and positive long-term change.*

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Summary:

While ambassadors demonstrated a positive shift in their belief that electoral participation contributes to long-term change, they stressed the point that government should fund and listen to communities as well as act in a way consistent with what they hear and observe. Consistent across both cohorts, ambassadors prioritized broader cultural shifts that dismantle structural oppression through empowering communities to take charge of their own conditions. This includes allowing young people and members of marginalized groups to see themselves reflected in the process as well as democratizing processes to include more input and contributions from civil society.

Importantly, ambassadors identified access to and decision-making power over funding and financial support as a key component in building lasting change at a broader level. Collaboration between governments and civil society members, particularly youth-led organizations and projects, was cited as the mechanism by which this could be achieved. Ambassadors expressed their desired role for young people to be contributors in this work and messengers for their communities in this process, both through formal career aspirations as well as on a less formal basis.

4. Behaviour Change

I feel like my engagement changed, and the way that I think about engagement, everything changed. Now I realize how important this is, how powerful this can be, this kind of stuff that we do. (Ambassador, Montreal)

→ *Ambassadors showed a 29% increase in range of specific political actions taken in the last year from pre- to post-survey for the cohort.*

→ *Across specific indicators, ambassadors demonstrated broad shifts in the forms of engagement in which they participate. Cohort 1 ambassadors experienced significant positive shifts in their engagement with collective action, even reporting some negative shifts in individual action as a result. In interviews, they showed a significant increase in the value they place on collective as opposed to individual action. Thus demonstrating a reprioritization of their engagement activities. Cohort*

2 demonstrated a stronger shift towards leadership, increasing their engagement in activities that required more individual initiative and greater confidence in their ability to take that initiative.

→ *Ambassadors consider the program a catalyst for positive change in their life that stems from a realization of their own potential through the process of implementing their project, developing connections with others and exposure to community work and development. For some ambassadors, this was a first opportunity to take on a leadership role, which they felt developed the skills for them to take on and seek more leadership opportunities in the future.*

→ *Positive changes to self-esteem, confidence and a sense of their own capabilities and power has lead program participants to seek engagement opportunities. For instance, ambassadors reported an increase in the frequency with which they discussed civic engagement and social issues with community members, friends or*

"As the nature of civic participation rapidly evolves, young people and civil society actors have a mutual responsibility to engage with one-another. This is the only way that disenfranchised voices can be empowered and various perspectives can be respected in decision making."

–Saeed Selvam, Laidlaw Foundation

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family. Many ambassadors express either a shift from previous career aspirations or a clarity about future employment goals.

→ *Ambassadors across hubs acknowledged that they had been exhibiting those behaviours progressively more as the program continued. For instance, one ambassador has set a goal to create a resource for other youth to help them get more involved. Several other ambassadors applied for funding during the program in order to start their own community initiatives.*

Summary:

Many ambassadors were already engaged in individual political action (demonstrated with smaller positive shifts) before starting the RISE program. However, the largest increase in frequency of engagement was found in bridging individual action with collective action. Ambassadors reported developing a deeper understanding of collective power and shifting in their role in community engagement. This included non-political civic engagement as well as activism. When analyzed alongside the ambassadors' conceptualization of power (strong belief in the power of collective impact and action), these patterns instead reflect a broader shift in priority away from individual action. This demonstrated a stronger inclination towards collective engagement opportunities that have the potential to build more momentum, power and have greater impact.

5. Network Development

"I think because of this program, I am definitely more youth minded in a way that when I think back on my experiences and the opportunities that I didn't necessarily have, I want to create those for younger people." (Ambassador, Toronto)

"Since I'm new to Toronto, this program changed my life. I have new friends now. I got new friends in cool places, now. My social network has blossomed. My network grew across the country." (Ambassador, Toronto)

→ *Ambassadors placed a high priority on network development and collective action as an essential component of change. Through connecting with other youth, ambassadors believe that they are contributing to a larger ecosystem of youth-led democratic innovation. Through these connections, they expressed the belief that they are building capacity and power for and with other youth and contributing towards a broader movement towards youth participation in broader political change.*
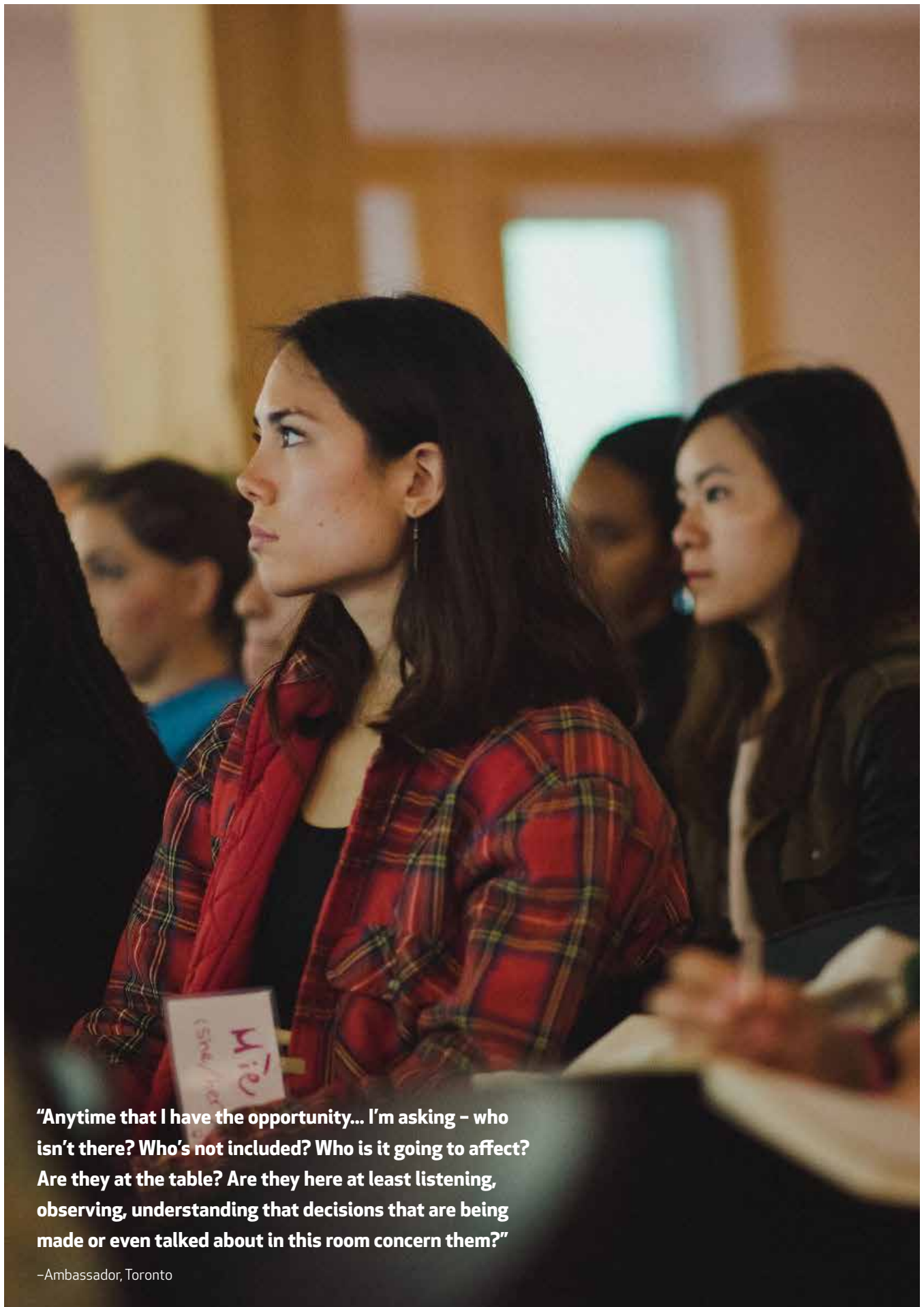
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"Anytime that I have the opportunity... I'm asking – who isn't there? Who's not included? Who is it going to affect? Are they at the table? Are they here at least listening, observing, understanding that decisions that are being made or even talked about in this room concern them?"

–Ambassador, Toronto

"Through their programming, Apathy is Boring is tackling what might be the biggest challenge facing democracy - disengagement. Helping youth to see themselves as important, effective participants in democracy, and giving them the tools, experience and space to put their ideas into action, is a massive service to society."

–Dr. Laura Stephenson, Co-Director of the Consortium on Electoral Democracy

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→ *Network development was a strength of both cohorts. Ambassadors reported they developed meaningful relationships with their peers through the program and this was a highlight for many.*

→ *Both cohorts reported developing relationships with youth from diverse backgrounds and reflected a strong belief that these connections (and connections with other community members outside the RISE program) were strengthened through their participation in the program.*

→ *Ambassadors reported additionally that networks developed through the program not only supported the project design and implementation, but developed into networks of support, mentorship and opportunity. This on both a peer level and on a broader level with employment, funding and further development opportunities and connections.*

→ *Ambassadors were highly likely to refer peers outside the program to RISE as well as to continue to participate in the program through alumni or other opportunities.*

Summary:
There is a clear desire among youth to develop networks and projects that actively support their peers and the broader community. In both cohorts, ambassadors in interviews express changes related to the potential power of their own engagement, but the emphasis was different between the two cohorts. In cohort 1, they often conceptualize their power in terms of their role as an individual participant in collective action. Cohort 1 ambassadors remarked frequently on the importance of individuals working together as the primary lever to achieving change either on a local level or on larger more systemic levels. In contrast, cohort 2 ambassadors express a stronger inclination towards leadership and linked recruitment and mobilization of others as a byproduct of their personal empowerment. As one ambassador shared:

"Anytime that I have the opportunity... I'm asking - who isn't there? Who's not included? Who is it going to affect? Are they at the table? Are they here at least listening, observing, understanding that decisions that are being made or even talked about in this room concern them?" (Ambassador, Toronto)

Ambassadors reported a clear shift in their understanding of what engagement means, how they can get involved and the role of peer-to-peer engagement. Ambassadors expressed pride in their ability to recruit new ambassadors from their social networks. As one ambassador shared, it was through their participation in the program that a friend of theirs decided to apply. They believe that they are modelling engagement for their peers and took pride in this aspect of their participation: "They will know that this kind of thing exists, and that I did this." (Ambassador, Montreal). This understanding was consistent across both cohorts and demonstrated a clear alignment with AisB's mission and values.

SECTION

04

Recommendations

Having identified the characteristics of youth-led democratic innovation and explored the RISE program as a case study, this report makes the following recommendations to inform best practices in youth engagement programs, policy and education that leverage youth culture in order to foster community wellbeing and a more robust democracy.

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1. Empower youth decision-making.

It is not enough to create a space for youth to convene. For true decision-making power to exist, youth must be empowered through access to and control over resources to bring their ideas to life. Through complete creative control, youth can develop a sense of power and confidence in their own abilities. The findings of the RISE case study show that youth want the creative liberty to design their own projects and decision-making power to execute their ideas.

2. Prioritize anti-oppression training and tools.

Programs that successfully incorporate youth-led democratic innovation must acknowledge the power structures that disadvantage and oppress certain groups within our communities. It is essential to affirm and centre the diverse lived realities as well as additional barriers faced by youth engaged in programs like RISE. This involves operating within a framework that creates spaces that are safe, conscious and open, especially for Indigenous, LGBTQ2IS+, disabled and racialized youth.

3. Incorporate (culturally appropriate) mentorship opportunities for supplemental support.

Pairing youth-led democratic innovation with experienced mentors who are able to support in project ideation and execution develops the networks of the youth as well as their skill sets and experience. Additionally, encouraging peer mentorship allows youth with existing skill sets to emerge and develop leadership skills, further building the capacity of youth networks.

It is important to note that merely offering mentorship opportunities is not sufficient for those who do not see themselves or their lived experiences reflected in the mentors being offered by a program (as is often the case with Indigenous youth or youth of colour). Therefore, mentors should be carefully recruited and reflect the cultural diversity of the youth participating in the program.

4. Create and communicate the "sandbox" for innovation.

Although the RISE program promotes and encourages youth-led decision-making among ambassadors, there are constraints in terms of budget, project theme and certain activities which must be respected. Expectations and constraints must be understood by the organization convening the youth and then clearly communicated to youth in order to build trust and demonstrate mutual respect. Make it clear what can and cannot be done and what influence they might have through the process.

5. Reinforce the value of the skills, experience and power of young people.

Youth are naturally curious, innovative and creative in their approach to change-making. Additionally, when a diverse group of youth are convened, their lived experiences can be informative, instructional and necessary to educating and engaging their peers and communities. Celebrate those strengths and empower them to use those innate attributes to respond to issues they care about.

6. When it comes to recruitment: do the work.

Some youth face greater barriers to engagement than their peers. Do the hard work of seeking out those youth and meeting them where they are. Ensuring that the program is flexible and that there are measures in place to provide extra support as needed is critical to engaging and retaining these youth and achieving true accessibility.

7. Incorporate feedback and be responsive to participants.

Core to Apathy is Boring's work is the practice of integrating feedback on an ongoing basis in order to remain responsive to youth. Youth decision-making is a critical component of the success of the program and it is included at every level, including the iteration of the program curriculum, based on feedback and recommendations.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of the Government of Canada and RBC in the development of this report and their ongoing support for the RISE program. Special thanks to Noah Aiken-Klar and Patrick Famaran of RBC's Future Launch Program in addition to Jo Voisin, Sarah Wiles and Brent Bauer of the Government of Canada for their continued support as well as all partners of the Canada Service Corps. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of MITACS Accelerate, without which, this report would not have been possible.

We would like to thank Apathy is Boring's RISE program team, past and present, for their contributions to the development of this report including Jamie Zarn, Rebecca Klaassen, Danielle Lediard, Celeste Alcena, Ivan Arturo, Aurore Iradukunda, Camille Georges, Miley Leong and Stephanie Jeremie. We would like to thank Qaggiavuut!, especially Ellen Hamilton, Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, Kathleen Meritt and Christine Tootoo, for their partnership in delivering RISE Nunavut. We would also like to acknowledge the many contributions of the Apathy is Boring staff team including Daniele-Jocelyne Otou, Taha Habib, Andrew Ng, Francesca Desulme, Melika Ranmal, Heather Nagy, Phil Dumouchel and Jackie Ndlovu. We would like to extend a special thank you to Brenagh Rapoport for her important contribution in proofreading and editing this report.

We would like to acknowledge Helena Vallès Photography for her contribution in photographing some of the magic of the RISE program, including many of the photos included in this report. A special thanks to Dr. Stuart Poyntz who served as a mentor and made a significant contribution to the research and analysis in the report. Additionally, we would like to extend our gratitude to Sharif Mahdy of The Students Commission, Sara Lyons of Community Foundations of Canada, Dr. Daniel Savas of the SFU Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Saeed Selvam of the Laidlaw Foundation, Chad Lubelsky of the McConnell Foundation, James Bartram of OceanWise and Dr. Laura Stephenson of the Consortium on Electoral Democracy.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the ongoing support of our Board of Directors and our Council of Advisors without whom, none of this would be possible. A special thank you to Niamh Leonard and Alexander Dirksen who reviewed an early draft of this report. And, of course, thank you to all the amazing ambassadors, volunteers, mentors, partners and advisors on the RISE program, past and present, who continue to make this program a success.

Appendix A & B

Appendix A

Cohort one:

Edmonton's Judge Me if you Can project included a structured dialogue with youth of diverse backgrounds around stereotypes and judgment as a barrier to social inclusion. The session was designed and facilitated by the ambassadors in order to bring an increased level of understanding between peers from diverse backgrounds and a variety of lived experiences. The dialogue was filmed and the edited videos were shared through a launch event as well as digitally.

Montreal's RISE-UP project focused on solidarity building among racialized youth in Montreal with a day-long workshop that focused on artistic expression and dialogue around issues of social exclusion. The team designed the workshop components and invited guests to participate. They hosted a celebratory event for community members to learn about what they had done and included a brief dialogue with the Deputy Mayor of Montreal.

The Ottawa Youth Rise project included a workshop series where they recruited different participants to reflect on social inclusion/exclusion within their communities and create art and build solidarity with other youth in the community. The artworks were displayed at a Youth Ottawa event which included high school-aged youth as well as community members and city councilors.

Cohort two:

Edmonton's Stay WOC festival centred around the identities and experiences of WOC (Women of Colour), and featured musical and spoken word performances, vendors, and other WOC artists in Edmonton. It was developed to be a safe space for Black and Indigenous Women and other Women of Colour, including trans and non-binary identities, to gather and share their stories and talents, be empowered, and build new relationships. The goal was to inspire more representation of WOC in Edmonton by celebrating diversity as a strength in the community.

Ottawa ambassadors developed the You are Community project in collaboration with existing newcomer organizations in order to create opportunities for refugee and newcomer youth to build meaningful connections within their community through days of community service. Refugee youth, newcomer youth, and youth mentors participated with the aim of creating lasting

relationships, networks, and skills. The ambassadors also hosted a final celebration which included networking and relationship-building opportunities for all of the youth who participated.

The Montreal hub project Je Suis Montreal / I am Montreal was developed to challenge the dominant narrative and understanding of what it means to be Canadian/Quebecer as a way to make space for more marginalized identities. They decided on a photography-based art project that centered racialized and indigenous youth. The final art project was shared at a launch party and vernissage event that showcased the photographs and included live music, testimonies from participants, networking opportunities and resources for racialized and indigenous youth.

In Toronto, the local ambassadors organized I am More T.O., a round-table discussion event that provided a forum for racialized youth from across the city to share how their lives have been impacted by the criminal justice system. Attendees participated in a panel discussion with community leaders before breaking off into smaller groups to share experiences. The event's attendees were also invited to record video testimonials of their own interactions with the criminal justice system.

Appendix B

KPI methodology

The KPIs aim to measure the success of the programming in the following areas: (1) skills development and capacity building, (2) sense of power, (3) understanding of positionality and systems-level change, (4) behaviour change (via the spectrum of engagement) and (5) network development (at personal and community levels).

Skill Development is measured both in terms of the actual reported skills that the Ambassadors feel they have developed, and their confidence and sense of their ability to utilize those skills. Skills measured include personal, professional, communications, leadership, networking and preparation for post-secondary skills.

Results related to Sense of Power examine the ambassadors' sense of their own ability to make change, both individually and as a part of a collective. This is measured using

their attitudes towards their ability to impact their communities, as well as the likelihood that they will continue with service work and the value they place on individual versus collective action.

Understanding of positionality refers to RISE's goal to connect the work of the ambassadors within their community with a sense of how change happens long-term and at a systems level. This area largely seeks to analyze the ambassadors' shifts in their conceptualization of the role of institutions and civil society.

Behaviour change (in terms of the spectrum of engagement) evaluates the progression of ambassadors in terms of the frequency with which they engage in actions that build power. Ambassadors were assessed in terms of their awareness, individual political action and collective political action and leadership.

Indicators for Network Development include 3 categories: (1) RISE Network: the ability to develop a strong network of participants, alumni and the organization, (2) Peer Network: the development of the ambassadors' individual social networks, and (3) Community Network: the development of ambassadors' access and network within the community sector beyond RISE.

Research Methods

Pre/post surveys

The pre- and post-surveys were the primary method of collecting quantitative data with some short-answer questions allowing for additional insight. All 5 evaluation areas were included in the survey through targeted questioning related to KPIs. All 19 ambassadors in cohort 1 and 21 ambassadors in cohort 2 completed both the pre- and post-survey.

Peer interviews

Peer interviews were introduced at two points during the cohorts as a method of collecting qualitative feedback on curriculum content as well as the ambassador's experience and feedback on the program. The ambassadors were asked to break into groups of two or three and provided with a series of questions to prompt their discussion, which was recorded. The recordings were typically a duration of twenty to twenty-five minutes.

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