

POLICY

TITLE: Youth Engagement Policy

NUMBER:

CATEGORY: Corporate Policy

DATE: February 2014

UPDATED:

REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS:

1. Town of Halton Hills Youth Needs Study
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The Town of Halton Hills values input from all members of the citizenry to shape our community. As such, we recognize the importance of youth involvement and youth voice within initiatives of the Town. The Corporation is committed to developing, supporting and promoting the involvement of youth.

PURPOSE

To ensure youth are engaged partners in advising, planning, delivering, communicating and evaluating the provision of municipal services.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles will guide the process of Youth Engagement:

- **Youth Needs Study**- material and recommendations from the study will provide background information and guidelines for decision making.
(<http://www.haltonhills.ca/initiatives/YouthStudy.php>)
- **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** – provides research based approaches and guidelines on how to support youth to be competent and healthy and to develop to their full potential. Within these approaches are methods and strategies for adults and youth working together on decision making initiatives.
(<http://www.engagementcentre.ca>)
- **Asset-Based Approach** –views effective community building as enhancing existing strengths and opportunities, rather than defining interventions in terms of deficiencies or needs. Emphasizing the promotion of strengths and skills of youth, and where youth are viewed as assets in the making (Search Institute; Developmental Assets).
(<http://www.search-institute.org>)

- **Youth Friendly Communities Approach**- suggests how policy-makers can develop structures and decision-making processes that strengthen and promote the health and wellbeing of young people in a community. Its long-term vision is to create living, playing learning and working environments for young people that are safer, healthier and more enriching (Play Works Partnership). (<http://playworkspartnership.ca/youth-friendly-communities>)

Definitions

Words not specifically defined hereunder shall have the meaning commonly given to them in a standard Canadian English Language Dictionary with respect for the context in which such words are used.

Department refers to the applicable departments within the Town of Halton Hills.

Youth: refers to Halton Hills residents within the age range of 13 – 19 years.

Youth Engagement: refers to empowering all youth as valued citizens in the decision making and feedback process around issues that affect them personally and or that they believe to be important.

Civic Engagement: refers to an individual and collective action designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement has many elements, but in its most basic sense it is about decision making, or governance over who, how, and by whom community's resources will be allocated.

Positive Youth Development (PYD): refers to a philosophy or approach promoting a set of guidelines on how a community can support its young people so that they can grow up competent and healthy and develop to their full potential.

Town all references to “Town” denote “The Corporation of the Town of Halton Hills”.

SCOPE

This policy outlines practices for sustainable and effective engagement of youth for Civic Engagement within the Town. This policy will include and engage Halton Hills youth, including youth of diverse cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds, youth with disabilities, youth of varied sexual orientation and youth who might be otherwise marginalized (e.g. out-of-school, homeless, low income, etc.).

POLICY DETAILS

Youth diversity is recognized, acknowledged and celebrated. As such, intentional processes of engagement will ensure the views of youth and their contributions to the community are taken into account for Town studies, strategies, policies and initiatives.

Youth engagement within the Town will support and foster Positive Youth Development (PYD) and will allow for leadership and the advancement of other transferable skills. Youth will have access to information and resources that will ensure successful opportunities related to civic engagement.

Youth Engagement will be supported through the following organizational standards:

- 1) The Town of Halton Hills is committed to the Civic Engagement of youth through policy development; presence on civic committee's working groups, and specific means of communication.
- 2) Staff are taking the appropriate steps for engaging youth within Civic Engagement initiatives by ensuring adequate means of recruitment, transportation, recognition, and on-going mentoring for success.
- 3) Staff is provided with information, tools, and strategies to support youth involved in civic engagement by providing training for adults on how best to work with and support youth in the community.

PROCEDURES

Refer to the Youth Engagement Procedures and other applicable Town and Department Policies and Procedures.

POLICY REVIEW and REPORTING

Annually, staff monitor documents and recommend policy and procedure changes for consideration by the Corporation and/ or Department Management or upon the update of legislation and/or industry standards.



Town of Halton Hills
Youth Engagement Procedures

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Town of Halton Hills Corporate Policies & Procedures Referenced:

- Social Media Policy CS-2010-0002
- Youth Needs Study

Recreation & Parks Policies & Procedures Referenced:

- Strategic Action Plan – FINAL REPORT
- Volunteer Management Policy & Procedures

Organizational Standard 1

The Town of Halton Hills is committed to the civic engagement of youth.

Procedure 1.1 – Considering youth

Youth will be considered when reviewing or developing the Corporation's mandate and values, strategic plans, studies, public input, policies and procedures.

Youth can be involved through a variety of capacities:

- Members of advisory committees
- Members of the Mayor's Youth Action Committee
- Volunteer/ Student positions within the Town of Halton Hills
- Participant of strategic workshops and organized focused groups
- Participant through literature, online surveys, online polls

Procedure 1.2 – Advisory committees

The Town of Halton Hills recruits members of the community to apply and obtain a seat on advisory committees that address different needs within Halton Hills. Town advisory committees promote and designate up to two youth seats where there is youth interest on committees to represent a sustained youth voice. Terms of reference will include information regarding youth as voting and/or non-voting members as relevant to the committee's mandate.

If available, it is recommended that youth have committee term lengths that are consistent with the school year. Therefore, youth should be provided with the opportunity for a one term (8-10 months) commitment.

Procedure 1.3 – Mayor's Youth Action Committee (MYAC)

The Mayor's Youth Action Committee is Town staff's direct link to an engaged group of youth. The Mayor's Youth Action Committee (MYAC) is a voluntary group of young individuals between the ages of 13 and 21 whose goal is to support and recognize their fellow youth, to act as an advocate for youth issues, and to promote a positive image of youth within our community. In addition, MYAC's mandate is to provide youth voice and advocacy to council and Town staff. Through advising the Recreation Coordinator – Youth and or designate this group of youth can be engaged to provide input or feedback regarding Town initiatives.

The Mayor's Youth Action Committee recruits youth within Halton Hills to participate as a member of the committee. Recruitment and screening is completed by the Recreation Coordinator- Youth and/or designate.

Procedure 1.4 –Town Staff, Volunteers or Students

The Town of Halton Hills employs youth in paid and non-paid positions within different departments. These youth are currently engaged in the Corporation and therefore would be available for participation. Engaged groups include:

- Part time and seasonal part time staff
- Recreation & Parks volunteers
- Coop students and interns
- Halton Hills Library staff
- Youth Ambassadors

Procedure 1.5 – Strategic workshops and organized focused groups

Strategic workshops and focus groups facilitated at school and youth serving organization related to civic engagement will allow for effective youth involvement.

Strategic workshops and focus groups can be held at school locations within school hours with the approval of the appropriate Board and principal. In addition feedback can be facilitated through youth serving organizations during regularly scheduled programming.

This option provides the greatest level of accessibility for youth involvement. In addition, public open house meetings should explore the option of hosting these communication sessions close to school locations and at different times to allow for greater youth participation. For example: hosting a public open house meeting in a school cafeteria.

Procedure 1.6 –Literature, online surveys, online polls

Civic engagement and request for feedback can be completed through both internet and mail out communication. Providing resources, surveys or request for feedback through the internet provides accessibility to youth. Methods of communication should include social media solutions such as Facebook, Twitter, and utilizing school communication tools.

Surveys that are sent directly to Halton Hills households will include a request for feedback from any youth that reside at that location. A survey or specific section within the feedback process should be provided as it is essential that youth have a voice as part of the household. In addition, providing incentives or creative motivations for completing the feedback will increase the responses.

Organizational Standard 2

<p>Staff are taking the appropriate steps for engaging youth within civic engagement initiatives</p>

Procedure 2.1 – Recruitment

The recruitment of youth for civic engagement initiatives will be done in a variety of ways to capture the diverse views of youth in Halton Hills.

Recruiting youth that are not already engaged within the Corporation is vital to the diversity of input and interest youth can provide for civic engagement. Keeping aligned with youth friendly approaches and positive youth development, outreach for youth input can be done in the following ways but is not limited to:

- Contact all four high schools within Halton Hills and provide an overview of the time commitment and the project. (Christ the King Secondary school, Georgetown District High School, Gary Allen High School, Acton District High School)
- Connecting with school parliaments and councils to recruit youth or to provide information.
- Include opportunities for civic engagement on the High school's volunteer information sheets.
- Connect with the local youth servicing agencies in Halton Hills to provide an opportunity for recruitment and information sharing.
- Working with Town staff around Town special events such as the Human Resource department's Take your Kids to work day initiative to provide students with available opportunities and future civic engagement initiatives.

When providing communication for the recruitment of youth for civic engagement, staff should include but are not limited to utilizing the following communication methods:

- Presentations in school or at Youth Serving agencies
- Written material with creative graphics and fonts
- Utilizing the Volunteer Halton directory
- Sending messages through social media outlets (*in compliance with the Social media policy*)
- Preparing school announcements/newsletters
- Providing information at School events
- Coordinating with Town special events (*i.e. Take your kid to work day, career days, staff appreciation*)

- Posting information in common youth friendly locations/designations
- Utilizing Town of Halton Hills communication such as, facility marquees, bulletin boards, posters, and website.

Procedure 2.2 - Transportation

Youth may not have access to transportation to attend meetings, focus groups, and workshops based on the selected location. Transportation might need to be provided to youth that would include, scheduling a taxi or a bus for the youth. If applicable, budget will have a minor impact related to the initiative or project.

Procedure 2.3- Incentives and recognition

A clear purposeful role is a strong motivator for youth to become engaged in a meaningful way. In addition, communicating to youth that their input and participation will make a difference to their current and future community is another important incentive for youth engagement.

Incentives to engage youth for civic engagement can include but are not limited to:

- Specific training for the development of transferable skills
- Supporting letters or documents for employment or school admissions
- Exposure to different career information
- Working with friends or peers and creating the chance to build more relationships
- Creative, youth friendly incentives (*i.e. food, prizes, rewards*)
- Future co-op placements or paid positions

Communicating how the youth's involvement will be recognized is another incentive and method of retaining youth. Recognition can be provided through but not limited to:

- Acknowledgement of their volunteer hours
- Reference letter for the purpose of schools endeavors or employment
- A letter outlining their involvement and contribution to the project
- Peer recognition through the schools
- Acknowledgement at the annual youth awards and volunteer appreciation ceremony
- Acknowledgement on documentation of results as part of the study, action plan or strategic plan.

Procedure 2.4 – Tracking and monitoring

Youth involved within advisory committees should be required to provide a resume and applicable application. Appropriate tracking and record keeping practices will be put in place for advisory committee applications.

Youth participating as part of a public meeting, workshop, focus group, or school presentation should provide contact information and if applicable permission forms from a legal guardian.

When providing documentation for a youth in terms of a reference letter or confirmation of volunteer hours, please refer to Human Resource's Reference Letter Policy and the Recreation & Parks Department's volunteer procedures for volunteer letters.

Organizational Standard 3

<p>Staff is provided with information, tools and strategies to support youth involved in civic engagement</p>
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Procedure 3.1 – Staff orientation and training

An orientation and training will be provided to any adults working on civic engagement projects that involve youth. The training and orientation provides support and resources for working with youth to mentor and develop their skills, to ensure full potential to contribute, and to ensure the initiative remains youth friendly. Training will be facilitated by the Recreation Coordinator- Youth or designate.

Training will include but is not limited to:

- Positive Youth Development training
- Everyone's an Asset Builder- Developmental Assets training
- Overview of the Town of Halton Hills Youth Needs Study
- Project overview training

Organizational Standard 4

Administration of the Youth Engagement Policy and Procedures

Procedure 4.1 – Policy communication

The Town of Halton Hills' Youth Engagement Policy is communicated as broadly as possible across the community.

- Advisory Committee recruitment information
- Town of Halton Hills website
- Halton Hills schools
- Mayor's Youth Action Committee information and website
- Recreation & Parks Leisure & Community Guide

In addition, communication to internal Town staff will occur but is not limited to:

- Advisory committee recruitment information
- Email, information sessions
- Town of Halton Hills website
- Departmental webpages
- New staff orientations

Procedure 4.2 – Policy evaluation

Annually, staff monitor and document recommended policy and procedure changes for consideration by the Corporation. Staff will utilize community partners and provincial/national organizations to access resources, training materials, best practices and legislation.

Through this evaluation process, youth are to be engaged in the revision and evaluation of the Youth Engagement policy and procedures.