

FUTURE LINKS

YOUTH ROUND TABLES IN CANADA

Young people can contribute

to better decision making and take action by forming their own round tables. Round tables are new ways of generating action to implement sustainable development in Canada. Participants should come from many different backgrounds of society. They also work on a consensus approach to decision-making, in trying to settle conflict and come to creative solutions. They work with non-confrontational approaches which encourage openness, acceptance of different viewpoints and a genuine desire to find "common ground".

Youth round tables should be organized and run by young people.

The round table process can deal with many issues in your community. Some will relate to sustainable development. Youth and sustainable development are linked by the need to plan for and protect the future.



Young people can make a difference. The legendary King Arthur and The Knights of the Round Table were all under the age of 25. In fact Arthur himself, was only sixteen when he first called his Knights together to defend the realm.

Humankind is supposed to be an intelligent species, yet we keep polluting. We seem to want to wipe ourselves right off the earth and no one is doing anything about it. That bothers me, everyone seems to have given up hope of trying. I haven't. It isn't easy and it isn't supposed to be, but I'm accomplishing something.

Terry Fox, 1959-1981

(quoted in Scrivener, Terry Fox: his story, 1981)

It is imperative that youth from all parts of the world participate actively in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their futures. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.

Agenda 21: Chapter 25

(from The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development 1992)

WHAT IS A YOUTH ROUND TABLE?

- All members of the round table participating equally and with a basic respect for each other.
- Many decisions can be made by consensus. Sound decisions can be achieved through good facilitation which is based on finding common ground and agreement.
- Clear and honest communication is critical to the final result -- a youth round table is open, critical, facilitative and problem-solving.
- The formation of partnerships and having key stakeholders in decision making is vital to round table success.
- Youth round tables can be organized formally through schools, working with teachers, or with churches and YMCA's and YWCA's. They can also be organized by young people informally, for example, within a neighbourhood or region.

CASE EXAMPLE -- WESTERN CANADA

In Vancouver, British Columbia a group of youth in the seventh grade formed an organization called the Environmental Children's Organization (E.C.O.). These young people have spoken on environmental issues in many local schools and at an international conference of youth. They raised funds through bake sales and slide shows. The funds were then used to print a newspaper and buy a water filter to supply cleaner water to a whole Penan village, in Sarawak, Malaysia. In fact, they raised enough funds to send 4 members of E.C.O. and 2 young Kayapo girls from Aueré to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development can be addressed through a youth round table. The range of issues are all issues affecting society: public transportation, the arts, education, poverty, homelessness, employment and working practices, crime, pollution, development, agricultural practices, health, environmental, economic and cultural security, racial and gender equity, consumption for healthy & environmentally-sound choices, biodiversity, the inequity between the Northern and Southern countries, and debt relief.

Sustainable development was defined in the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". (p.43, *Our Common Future*)

Ten principles for sustainable development have been developed by the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, an independent body of Canadians who provide advice to the Prime Minister and Canadian Society. These principles are:

- 1. Stewardship**
Treat the earth with respect for the benefit of all generations.
- 2. Shared Responsibility**
If we all try and work together, we'll do better -- at home, school, work, and in the community alike.
- 3. Prevention and Resilience**
Think before you act - what will the impacts be? - Assess risks and prepare for the unexpected.
- 4. Conservation.**
Maintain and enhance our ecosystems.
- 5. Energy and Resource Management.**
Use renewable and non-renewable resources wisely.
- 6. Waste Management**
Subscribe to the 4R's -- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and then Recover in that order.
- 7. Rehabilitation and Reclamation**
Where the environment is damaged, think of a project that would renew it.
- 8. Scientific and Technological Innovation**
Strive to integrate the economy, the environment and social well being in education, research and work.
- 9. International Responsibility**
Think globally while acting locally.
- 10. Global Development**
Canada should help developing nations to act with these basic objectives in mind.



Joan of Arc was only seventeen when she defended the honor of France and in doing so became one of the most famous heroines ever.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN A YOUTH ROUND TABLE?

- Young people who want to learn from one another and work together on issues and problems that affect their lives now, and in the future.
- Youth from all backgrounds and ways of life.
- Youth who recognize the value of all sectors of society working together.
- Youth wishing to acquire the knowledge and skills to confront issues at stake.
- Young people who believe that they can play a leading role in making a difference in their day-to-day lives, and in their communities, ultimately working towards a healthier planet.

INVOLVEMENT

Gathering and maintaining youth involvement is essential to the youth round table process. For an on-going youth round table, sustaining its membership is critical. This can be assisted by:

1. Forging partnerships and linkages with organizations, institutions, and businesses. These linkages are quite important for the sustainability of the round table, allowing resources to be shared, and laying a foundation for future mutual education and support.
2. Setting up a process to ensure some continuity of youth direction of the round table with replacement of one-third of the youth on the round table every year. Thus, membership becomes staggered.
3. Arranging a creative method of funding the activities of the youth round table when and if required.

WAYS OF OPERATING

1. Respect and dignity are fundamental to a round table.
2. A fair and open process of communication is also vital to a well-run youth round table.
3. Principles of good communication should also be set up by the people who are involved in the round table.
4. Consensus decision making is one way of working which might prove very useful for the success of the youth round table.

Defining "consensus" is a fundamental prerequisite for starting a round table process. There are many aspects to it and everyone needs to have their say. The consensus approach includes everyone, as compared to the "majority rules" approach where the minority is often ignored. Generally, participants compromise or come to a better understanding of other people's positions. Differences that can not be settled by consensus are respected and often set aside for later discussion and a different approach. Participants share the responsibility for resolving an issue. Consensus processes create decisions of compromise with credibility and where no one is a loser.

Steps to Consensus:

1. Participants should reach a common understanding of what is consensus decision-making.
2. Perceptions and positions should be openly stated.
3. Negotiation, bargaining, and facilitation of changing positions can occur through:
 - the separation of the people from the problem;
 - a focus on interests rather than positions;
 - the generating of a variety of possibilities and/or solutions before deciding what to do; and how to approach the situation;
 - working for mutual gain (win-win situations).

NETWORKING

It is very important for a youth round table to be connected to sources of support and interest in the community. Many people, citizens groups, small businesses, and institutions are able to help support, both financially and by sharing knowledge, a youth round table. Possible examples of these are: seniors centres, resident associations, local chamber of commerces, university professors, and so forth. Support can be in the form of providing meeting rooms, photocopying services, phone lines, credibility, and general encouragement for the activities of a youth round table. Gaining the support and communicating with local government and regional authorities can also be very useful. This can allow decisions made by the round table to be presented to governments. Key points about networking are:

1. A youth round table's success ultimately will depend on their linkages to the greater community.
2. Existing decision-makers in business, government and institutions will be exposed to including a wider group of people in their decision making and the youth round tables can ensure their unique viewpoints towards solving the problems are heard.

CASE EXAMPLE -- CENTRAL CANADA

In Quebec, a youth organization called "Enjeu et Environnement Jeunesse", ran a province-wide tour on the issue of Energy. The tour visited 37 colleges and universities during the months of February and March 1992. The tour resulted in a referendum of those young people visited. The outcome of 12000 people who voted found that 75% of these young people supported a moratorium on all large energy developments until a full public debate on energy is held in Quebec. The referendum also found that 55% of these young people supported a tax on gasoline in order to better fund public transit systems. This information was presented to the governments of Quebec and Canada.



In the 1960's young people from around the world became increasingly frustrated and concerned about the nuclear arms race. Their concern and protest eventually led to world nuclear disarmament.

How to set up a Youth Round Table

1. Identify an issue or initiate a general discussion in your community that concerns you.
2. Find fellow youth who are also interested in the issue.
3. Organize a meeting to discuss the issue.
4. Locate resources and identify key stakeholders who should be involved in the issue. Examples of resources might be the provision of mailing costs, a person with good facilitation skills, or access to photocopying services. Stakeholders might be: business owners, politicians, developers, public servants, social welfare workers, community volunteers.
5. Recruit stakeholders to begin exploring and defining common areas of concern and work together to explore the issue and resolve conflicts. Creativity might be required in order to get all stakeholders to participate.

In the 1990's young people are concerned about the health of the planet. Increasingly they are demanding change to ensure a sustainable and healthy future for everyone. Youth today realize that this means changing the way we develop the earth both economically, socially and politically.

Useful References:

Youth Action Guide on Sustainable Development is available from AISEC International, IFC Student Representative, Rue Washington 40 (Box 10), B1050, Brussels, Belgium.

Student Action for a Viable Environment Guide is available from the SAVE Tour National Office, 3-103 4th Avenue, Ottawa, ON., K1S 2L1. Phone: (613) 235-0217.

Youth Environmental Workbook is available from the Director of the International Program, Trent University, Peterborough, ON., K9J 7B8. Phone: (705) 748-1314.

Preserving Our World by Warner Troyer is available from the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, #1 Nicholas, Suite 1500, Ottawa, ON., K1N 7B7. Phone: (613) 992-7189.

Reaching Agreement: Volume 1 Consensus Processes in British Columbia. This document is available from the British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, 229-560 Johnson Street, Victoria, B.C., V8W 3C6. Phone: (604) 387-5422.

Home and Family Guide: Practical Action for the Environment and

Community Workshops for the Environment \$10.70. These two documents are available from the Harmony Foundation P.O. Box 3444, Station "D", 340 Laurier Ave. West., Ottawa, ON., K1P 6P9. Phone: (613) 230-7353.

Environmental Youth Alliance, P.O. Box 34097, Station "D", Vancouver, BC, V6J 4M1. Phone: (604) 737-2258.

Canadian Youth Foundation at 55 Parkdale, 3rd Floor, Ottawa, ON, K1Y 1E5. Phone: (613) 761-9206.

Enjeu et Environnement Jeunesse, 4545 Pierre de Coubertin, C.P. 1000, Succursale "M", Montreal, PQ., H1V 3R2. Phone: (514) 252-3016.

One last potential resource are local Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA's and YWCA's.

*Note: This guide is intended for the operational use of round tables. An educational complement to this product is the "Teacher Curriculum Development Guide". It is also available from the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy at #1 Nicholas St., Suite 1500, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7B7. Phone: (613) 992-7189.



CASE EXAMPLE -- ATLANTIC CANADA

In Newfoundland and Labrador, a youth organization pressured the provincial government to legislate a recycling program for pop bottles. The Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Youth-Serving Agencies was instrumental in gathering over 6000 signatures on petitions urging a ban on non-returnable pop bottles and to start using returnable pop-bottles instead in the province. The campaign called Many Happy Returns, argued that returnable bottles meant less pollution, more jobs and more opportunities for youth groups to raise funds. The campaign proved fairly successful when the Minister of Environment and Lands announced a province-wide program to recycle aluminum and glass bottles and many types of plastic containers.

CASE EXAMPLE -- MID-WESTERN CANADA

In Saskatoon, Saskatchewan a group of youth called "Saskatchewan Students for Environmental Action" with "Silver Spring Prairie Committee" raised a significant amount of awareness and funds in attempt to preserve a unique transitional zone between mixed-grass and fescue prairie. Only 2% of this type of prairie remains of the original area it occupied. The groups gave many school presentations, held two rallies, a nature-walk, and sold pretend land titles of prairie in order to preserve this scarce natural prairie ecosystem. To their delight, the city government decided to set aside 33 acres of this rare transitional zone as a natural area preserve.

