

Ottawa's Youth Friendly Community Initiative

Overview

The Ottawa Youth Friendly Community Initiative (OYFCI) is being led by a network of partner organizations to facilitate youth in the process of evaluating how youth friendly Ottawa is. The objective of the initiative is to determine whether or not youth feel the city meets their needs and expectations. The network plans to engage youth throughout the City of Ottawa to map both the assets and deficits in youth friendly spaces and programs. The chosen methodology will be focus group sessions that will allow participants to engage interactively with one another and the facilitators.

This is a three-year project is intended to build and sustain youth participation. In year one, 2009, we intend to engage youth, partners, City Council and other stakeholders in the initiative. Youth will be invited to participate in focus group sessions in their schools and communities. High schools from both the OCDSB and OCCSB will be invited to participate. This is entirely voluntary and we will make every attempt to accommodate individual school schedules. Trained youth facilitators from within our partner network will lead the sessions or from within the schools themselves if that is preferable. The facilitators will be supported by their organizations.

In year two, 2010, we will continue to engage youth participants by inviting them to join the youth advisory who will help analyze the findings of the focus group discussions. These results will help inform future action. If there is consensus that the City of Ottawa meets the criteria of a youth friendly city a submission will be made by December 1, 2010 to the Play Works Partnership Youth Friendly Community Recognition Program. (Criteria attached)

In year three, 2011, a long-term action plan will be developed that will incorporate any recommendations by the youth advisory, Play Works or other stakeholders. It is anticipated that the community will be supportive of the plan.

Focus Group Sessions

Included in this application is the draft of the detailed design of the focus group sessions. The sessions are two hours in length and can easily be completed in a morning or afternoon session within a school timetable. Students aged 13 -19 can be selected by school administrators or teachers; volunteer to take part in the sessions; or a teacher could choose to have the session facilitation to a full class of students if it can be accommodated time wise. Other than age, there are no other eligibility criteria to participate. The size of group will ideally be 20-25 students to allow for smaller discussion groups of 4-6 students. Schools may have more than one focus group session if there is a high level of interest in participating.

YouthNet and YOUCAN – Youth Canada Association, network partners, have committed to provide experienced, trained facilitators to guide the sessions. All facilitators will have valid police record checks. There will also be an opportunity for interested youth to be trained in facilitation by YOUCAN and lead the sessions within their own school. School administrators will have the option of recommending students for this training. Some participating schools may have students already skilled in facilitation and administrators may request to facilitate the focus group ‘in-house’.

Participant Benefits

This initiative gives students the opportunity to participate in meaningful civic engagement in their city. Without their participation this project would not be successful. The focus group sessions will allow students to express openly and freely their opinions in both the larger group and smaller group discussions. They will learn critical assessment skills and how to formulate and articulate their opinions.

Participating students will be invited to participate further in the project. Opportunities include joining the Youth Advisory Committee or taking a leadership role in keeping their school community informed of the initiative. The Advisory will participate in writing the Play Works application in year two further strengthening their skills in presenting their evaluation of the City of Ottawa. Students will have their beliefs widely disseminated to a variety of stakeholders and decision makers. Opportunities for public speaking on the initiative may also occur.

Finally, the network partners of the OYFCI are committed to making participation in this initiative as seamless as possible for participating schools. All materials and resources required will be provided. No opinions and information gathered at schools will be attributed to any school or individual. All documentation will be anonymous. Participation is voluntary and we will not discriminate against the participation of any student. Student safety is at the forefront and all requirements of the Ottawa-Carleton Research Advisory will be met. We will endeavor to make the experience for students both meaningful and fun.