



Understanding Barriers and Solutions to Youth Service

Phase 1 Report

July 2018

Canada Service Corps has engaged with youth to better understand some of the challenges and motivations affecting young Canadians and their involvement in service to their communities.

Using innovative approaches to problem solving and the principles of design thinking by putting the user at the centre of program design, Canada Service Corps has co-created with youth to better understand and address the different needs and priorities of young people, particularly those who are the furthest away from opportunity to serve. Through interactive and creative workshops, Canada Service Corps asked youth to unpack complex challenges, brainstorm possible ideas or solutions to problems, as well as evaluate and re-analyze strengths and weaknesses of proposed solutions.

We asked youth to help us solve a few design questions:

1. To identify potential barriers to access service opportunities and explore the idea of incentives to motivate and enable youth to serve;
2. To explore mentorship and its effectiveness to usher youth into service; and,
3. To explore digital platforms as a of support for a youth's service journey.

From January to May 2018, Canada Service Corps engaged with over 300 youth from across the country, from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, aged 15 to 30 through 10 workshops delivered at various pan-Canadian youth-focused conferences and events. The workshops were delivered with a range of national organizations, with mandates ranging from youth engagement to Reconciliation to youth leadership development. A specific emphasis was made to target youth from various underrepresented groups, including LGBTQ2+, rural and remote youth, newcomer youth, youth with disabilities, and Indigenous youth. The findings in this report are derived from these engagement sessions. Some of the recurring insights we heard from young Canadians that will support youth service in Canada include;

- Offering an array of financial and non-financial incentives to youth that meet the needs of different stages of life;
- Establishing a comprehensive online platform that tracks service hours, matches youth to service opportunities and connects youth with educational resources and learning tools;
- Tailoring mentorship structures to meet youths' needs and based on their priorities, circumstances and life stages;
- Building capacity in community organizations; and
- Incorporating service learning in the secondary school system.



Background on Canada Service Corps

On January 16, 2018, the Prime Minister and Minister of Youth launched the design phase of the Canada Service Corps, a new national youth-focused program that aims to encourage young Canadians to get involved in service to their communities and gain valuable skills and experience that will benefit them in every aspect of life.

As a nationwide initiative, Canada Service Corps will help more young Canadians to understand the importance of serving their country, as well as facilitate access to service opportunities that are meaningful to young people.

During the summer of 2016, Employment and Social Development Canada's Innovation Lab undertook some exploratory research with 150 young Canadians about youth service to gain a better understanding of the deeper issues that underlie youth engagement. The six design insights include:

1. Service ushers youth into community;
2. Service is a form of education;
3. Selflessness and self-interest co-exist;
4. The messenger matters;
5. Canada has strong cultural values and infrastructure for service; and
6. Service is a privilege and not accessible to everyone.

These six design insights have helped to guide us on what we need to explore, validate and test further with young Canadians during the design phase.

During the design phase, Canada Service Corps is reaching out and talking to young Canadians to involve them in co-creating the signature program, anticipated to be launched in 2019. Understanding their motivations and interests, and what supports could be implemented to help youth get and stay involved in service to their communities, are key questions we want young Canadians to help us answer.

From January to May 2018 during the first phase of our co-creation with youth, we delivered 10 workshops with over 300 youth from across the country on three key themes:

1. Identify potential **barriers** to accessing service opportunities and, explore the idea of **incentives** to motivate and enable youth to serve;
2. Explore **mentorship** and its effectiveness in ushering youth into service; and,
3. Explore **digital platforms** as a means of supporting a youth's service journey.

Theme: 1) Barriers & Incentives

Canada Service Corps is trying to better understand how we can reduce some of the barriers that prevent youth from serving their communities. By means of a user-centred design approach, we asked youth to observe, reflect and identify reasons that may prevent young Canadians from serving their communities, and to propose possible solutions to reduce those barriers.

By better understanding the motivations of young Canadians and the societal and economic barriers they face to accessing service opportunities, we can better design and test incentives that may help to motivate and provide support to youth who want to develop their skills and get involved in their communities, but don't have the means to do so.

Barriers to Service

Lack of awareness of existing service opportunities:

Young Canadians have expressed a desire to participate in and give back to their community, but often don't know how to get started or where to look. Youth have consistently expressed that they would like service opportunities to be more accessible. They mentioned that having youth service resources available in places they frequent, such as libraries, community centres and employment centres might be a good entry point for youth to find out more about service opportunities.

"Foster a volunteer commitment early on and youth are more likely to continue volunteering later in life".

Lack of infrastructure: While there are many passionate, dedicated and active young Canadians making a difference in their communities, youth expressed that the existing infrastructure to support service is lacking. Many youth-serving organizations simply don't have the capacity to offer service opportunities for youth due to the associated cost with delivering programming. We heard there is a need to "build communities from the ground up", to ensure that government-led youth programs are sustainable in communities and funded for a longer period of time (i.e. multi-year funding), instead of the "in and out" approach that communities have experienced with previous government programming. In some cases, such as rural and remote areas, and on reserves, youth highlighted opportunities simply do not exist, and the distance to the nearest opportunity is too far to travel. We also heard there is a need to provide funding and support to organizations to increase accessibility to service opportunities for youth with disabilities.

Service undervalued: Some youth expressed there is a general lack of recognition among adults, the community and peers of the importance of service and its role in skills development. Youth would like to see service learning in the school system that could benefit their employability, life skills and strengthen their communities.

Poverty: We heard youth from low-income families experience increased barriers to serve because they are not able to give up their time. Often, they need to work to help pay the bills or care for family members while their parents are working. Indigenous youth highlighted that basic needs are lacking in many communities, such as food security or access to clean drinking water, and there is a need to address those issues first. Other youth highlighted the prevalence of gang and crime involvement, and drug use in their communities, and how service programming could be beneficial to keep them safe and out of trouble.

Lack of time: Youth have consistently stated that not having enough spare time prevents them from getting involved in service, particularly due to heavy school workloads, part-time jobs, extra-curricular activities and family obligations (e.g. caring for siblings or their own children).

Cultural sensitivity: Generally, youth from diverse backgrounds expressed that a lack of connection may prevent them from participating in a service opportunity. Youth mentioned a need to offer service opportunities with Indigenous traditional or cultural knowledge incorporated within the programming. For example, building in time within service offerings to allow for different cultural practices (prayer, fasting, etc..) may help newcomer youth feel more supported in their service journeys. Similarly, weaving in Indigenous cultural practices within a service offering would make it more accessible to Indigenous youth.

"It is important to show youth the positive impact that they can have on their community. Volunteering helped shape my social identity."

Poor mental health: From suicide to gender-based violence and discrimination, youth expressed that many of their peers or they themselves have experienced traumatic events or great losses, or are dealing with emotional instability. Youth discussed the importance of having service opportunities that promote positive mental health and include prevention efforts to help improve well-being. LGBTQ2+ youth raised the concern of a need for programs that tackle social isolation.

Incentives

Allowance: Youth commonly expressed that while they often want to participate in service opportunities and give back to their communities, they often do not have the financial means to do so. Youth suggested that having some of their living expenses covered (such as meals, lodging, transportation, and child care expenses either by offering a stipend, honorarium or some form of remuneration), would be a good motivator to offset the costs associated with participating in a service opportunity.

Grants: Not all youth are on the same pathway, so having options available that meet the needs of different youth is essential. Some young Canadians are experiencing financial hardship due to the cost associated with pursuing higher education. To better support all youth in their pursuit of education, youth discussed the possibility of recognizing service hours through an educational award or grant (to pursue post-secondary education or vocational training). Alternatively, a start-up grant could be offered to finance a service project for those who wish to pursue social entrepreneurship.

Recognition: Some of the youth expressed the importance of being recognized for their contributions to making a difference and to their communities. They discussed the concept of a certificate of recognition or award signed by the Prime Minister of Canada to recognize their service hours. Other youth clearly felt that recognition was less important. Inuit youth told us that service is not about being recognized; it is about helping other people and your community. It is an unspoken cultural custom that a person who serves is a person of dignity, maturity and prestige. It shows strong character and is a greatly admired quality.

"Integrate service work in all educational curriculum".

Networking: Connecting with other people with similar interests and passions was discussed as an incentive for youth to get involved in service initiatives. Youth want the opportunity to meet new people, including mentors to help guide them in their personal and professional development. Peer support and mentors were highlighted as a means to encourage youth to participate in service in a sustained manner. Youth discussed existing supports that could be leveraged for LGBTQ2+ youth in secondary schools, such as through Gay-Straight Alliances and Queer-Straight Alliances, peer support networks in school that provide a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for students.

Accreditation: Youth often get involved in service opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge in a field they are passionate about or looking for employment. Tracking the competencies and skills acquired during service, officially recognizing and validating their experiences was of great interest to young Canadians, as well as the ability to use service hours accumulated towards secondary or post-secondary course credits.

Helping others: We have often heard from youth that one of the reasons they get involved in service to their communities is to help



others. Inuit youth shared the story of Caleb, a 12 year boy, who put up a Facebook post offering to shovel driveways. He was often hungry and suffered abuse in his personal life, but still offered to shovel snow for others without expectation of payment. We were told that the concept of sharing is central to the Inuit culture and that each person has a contribution to make and is a valued contributor to their community.

Theme: 2) Mentorship

Mentorship relationships, whether formal or informal, have been used in many forms to guide individuals who may need assistance or are struggling with societal barriers, difficult conditions or as a mechanism to share and pass down experience and knowledge. We asked young Canadians if mentorship has played an important role in their lives in an effort to better understand the key characteristics of a meaningful mentorship experience and the qualities of a good mentor.

Finding a mentor: We heard from youth that there is a lack of leadership on the ground, and smaller communities are particularly in need of mentors. Youth told us they want tailored mentorship structures to meet their needs based on their priorities and where they are in life. Having easy access to mentors, such as in elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions, as well as community centres and libraries, is important to youth. Youth seek mentors for guidance about getting involved in their community and feeling empowered to do so. Youth recommended a “Mentor to Mentee Community Meet-up Program” or a community champions program to help build capacity at the local level.

Making a connection: Being able to relate to someone and sharing common interests and life experiences is of significant importance to many youth. For some, they connect best with their peers who help them to get into service by sharing advice on how to get started and provide guidance on how to lead their own community projects. While peer-to-peer mentorship is an important form of relationship building and personal development, youth also expressed the value of having an older mentor to transfer knowledge between different generations.

Indigenous youth highlighted the important role that intergenerational knowledge sharing plays in Indigenous communities, particularly by Elders as keepers of tradition and culture who share their knowledge, provide guidance, and teach younger generations.

Youth also want to have access to mentors with cultural and socio-economic backgrounds similar to their own circumstances. For instance, newcomer youth could benefit from having access to a mentor with a similar cultural background or life experience. This is of particular importance to Indigenous youth who expressed a lack of Indigenous educators and councillors in secondary and post-secondary institutions. This was also important to LGBTQ2+ youth who told us they preferred a mentor with a similar lived experience and can relate to some of the challenges LGBTQ2+ youth may face.

Positive youth development: Youth also highlighted the role that mentors play in skills development and confidence building. For youth dealing with difficult situations or poor mental health, young Canadians believe that a mentorship relationship can help at-risk youth build resilience.

Theme: 3) Digital Platforms to Support Youth Service



Canada Service Corps wants to better understand how a digital platform can be used to foster greater civic engagement. Youth were asked to think of issues, challenges and solutions surrounding the use of a digital platform to support youth in their service to communities.

“Make a platform that empowers youth, and gives them agency in deciding what they want to do.”

Centralized approach: There is strong support for a central platform where young Canadians can find service opportunities in their communities, track their service journey, use a resume builder function, find tools and training resources, and network with peers, mentors, and experts in the field. There was also a preference for a platform tailored to the individual user.

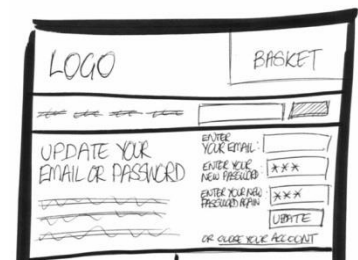
Tracking service hours: We heard that young Canadians want a digital portfolio (hosted on a website or an app) that tracks their service over time with access to resources to support their journey.

Security: When using digital technology, young Canadians are concerned about security — not only in terms of their own privacy and data security, but also protection from cyber-bullying, online predators or scams.

Accessibility: Youth expressed a concern regarding limited internet connectivity across the country, particularly in rural and remote communities, and for those who are financially vulnerable and can't afford a computer or mobile phone. Youth remarked that digital engagement should not be the only way of connecting with young Canadians. For instance, having a physical copy of a service portfolio or a toolkit that can be mailed out was suggested as an alternative method of reaching youth. Equally of importance is making sure that web platforms are accessible to youth with disabilities.

Promotion: The importance of leveraging existing social media platforms to reach maximum audiences and share information was reiterated by youth. Popular platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, and using popular hashtags are effective for spreading awareness and keeping audiences engaged. Youth are interested in seeing small amounts of information, photos, inspirational videos and Ted Talk style presentations to peak their interest. In addition, in-person outreach where youth already congregate, such as schools, community centres and libraries were also suggested as way to help promote the a digital platform. For rural and remote youth, using community boards and community radio and newspapers were seen as good vehicle for public outreach.

Interpersonal connections: While youth are spending more and more time on digital platforms, young Canadians are concerned that there is a lack of meaningful face-to-face interactions between youth, and suggested ensuring that opportunities to connect with others in-person, such as youth exchanges and summits also are available to support youth engagement.



Where We Went

Employment and Social Development Canada's Innovation Lab Focus groups and interviews with youth across Canada	150 participants	Summer 2016
Launch of Design Phase of Canada Service Corps - January 16, 2018		
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami National Inuit Youth Council Annual Meeting (Ottawa)	7 participants	January 19, 2018
National Association of Friendship Centres Aboriginal Youth Council Annual Meeting (Ottawa)	7 participants	January 19, 2018
RCMP Leadership Development Camp (Regina, SK)	18 participants	February 7, 2018
Canadian Roots Exchange National Youth Reconciliation Conference (Sudbury, ON)	25 participants	February 24, 2018
The #CanadaWeWant Conference (Nobleton, ON)	8 participants	February 27 – March 5, 2018
Assembly of First Nations National Youth Council Annual Meeting (Gatineau, QC)	15 participants	April 30, 2018
4 H Citizenship Conference (Ottawa, ON)	100 participants	May 2, 2018
YMCA National Conference (Orillia, ON)	25 participants	May 5, 2018
Gender and Sexuality Alliance Leadership Forum (Toronto, ON)	75 participants	May 10, 2018
Wisdom2Action in partnership with the National Alliance for Children and Youth Youth Engagement: Sharing What Works Conference	40 participants	May 14-15, 2018

Where We Are Going From Here

The lived experiences, ideas and solutions that we heard from young Canadians from across the country helped to frame the discussion we will have with youth moving forward. Our second phase, from June to September 2018, will focus on developing prototypes or models with the end user, so that the program and policies under development take into consideration different audiences and their respective needs. Over the next three months, young Canadians will have an opportunity to participate in prototyping workshops and evolve their ideas into tangible program components.

Journey through Prototypes



In collaboration with our partners, Students Commission of Canada and WE Canada, Canada Service Corps will deliver over two dozen co-development sessions with youth from across the country to build upon the insights learned through the exploration phase with the objective to design and test:

1. **Different models of incentive structures** (both financial and non-financial) that could help reduce barriers to service;
2. **Mentorship program structures** that could shepherd youth throughout their service journey; and,
3. **Digital platforms** that could be used to increase knowledge and awareness about service opportunities, and track an individual's service journey, including the skills, knowledge and experiences acquired.

Want to get involved and stay in touch? Learn more at: Canada.ca/canadaservicecorps and don't forget to use #LeadersToday and #CanadaServiceCorps.

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