

The Students  
Commission  
of Canada  
*Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement*



La commission  
des élèves du  
Canada  
*Le centre d'excellence pour  
l'engagement des jeunes*



# AGAINST THE CURRENT KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

It takes a village to raise a young leader

**May 14  
2025**

**🕒 Openings at:  
08:45AM**

**📍 Location:  
Toronto Reference  
Library**



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

**Registration & Welcome Breakfast**

**7:30AM - 8:45AM**

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**Opening Remarks & Session 1**

**8:45AM - 10:15AM**

Nurturing and Nudging Youth Leadership

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**Session 2**

**10:15AM - 11:30AM**

Nurturing Our Gifts: Cultural Approaches to Becoming First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Leaders

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**Session 3**

**11:30AM - 12:45AM**

Challenging Power: Youth Leadership in System Change

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**Lunch**

**12:45AM - 1:30PM**

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**Session 4**

**1:30PM - 2:45PM**

Challenging Norms: Leadership in Sports, Leisure and Recreation

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**Session 5**

**2:45PM - 4:00PM**

Barriers to Youth Engagement in Leadership

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**Closing Remarks**

**4:00PM - 5:00PM**

Cultivating Youth Changemakers

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# PROGRAM FLOW

## **Against the Current invites participants to explore the question: What is Youth Leadership?**

Rooted in decades of youth-led action, research, and practice, this knowledge exchange explores leadership as a dynamic process of learning, collaboration, and meaningful change.

Throughout the day, participants will journey through a "Leadership Village," engaging in conversations that nurture leadership at individual, social, and systemic levels. Together, we'll create a space where diverse forms of leadership are recognized, barriers are dismantled, and young people are supported in shaping the future.

### ***How will the day flow?***

Each session block begins with a Kick Start Presentation at the front of the room. Led by a team of youth leaders, adult allies from the non-profit sector, and academic partners from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, these 15-minute presentations combine evidence, lived experience, and critical questions.

After a short transition, participants head into their chosen Neighbourhood breakouts, where they'll engage in a 40-minute small group activity or conversation. These sessions are co-led by youth and adult facilitators and offer different ways of engaging with the session's central question.

Each 75-minute session block includes time to recharge between sessions—grab a coffee, keep a conversation going, or pause for reflection.

### ***Neighbourhoods to Explore***

Each Neighbourhood offers a distinct way to experience and explore youth leadership:

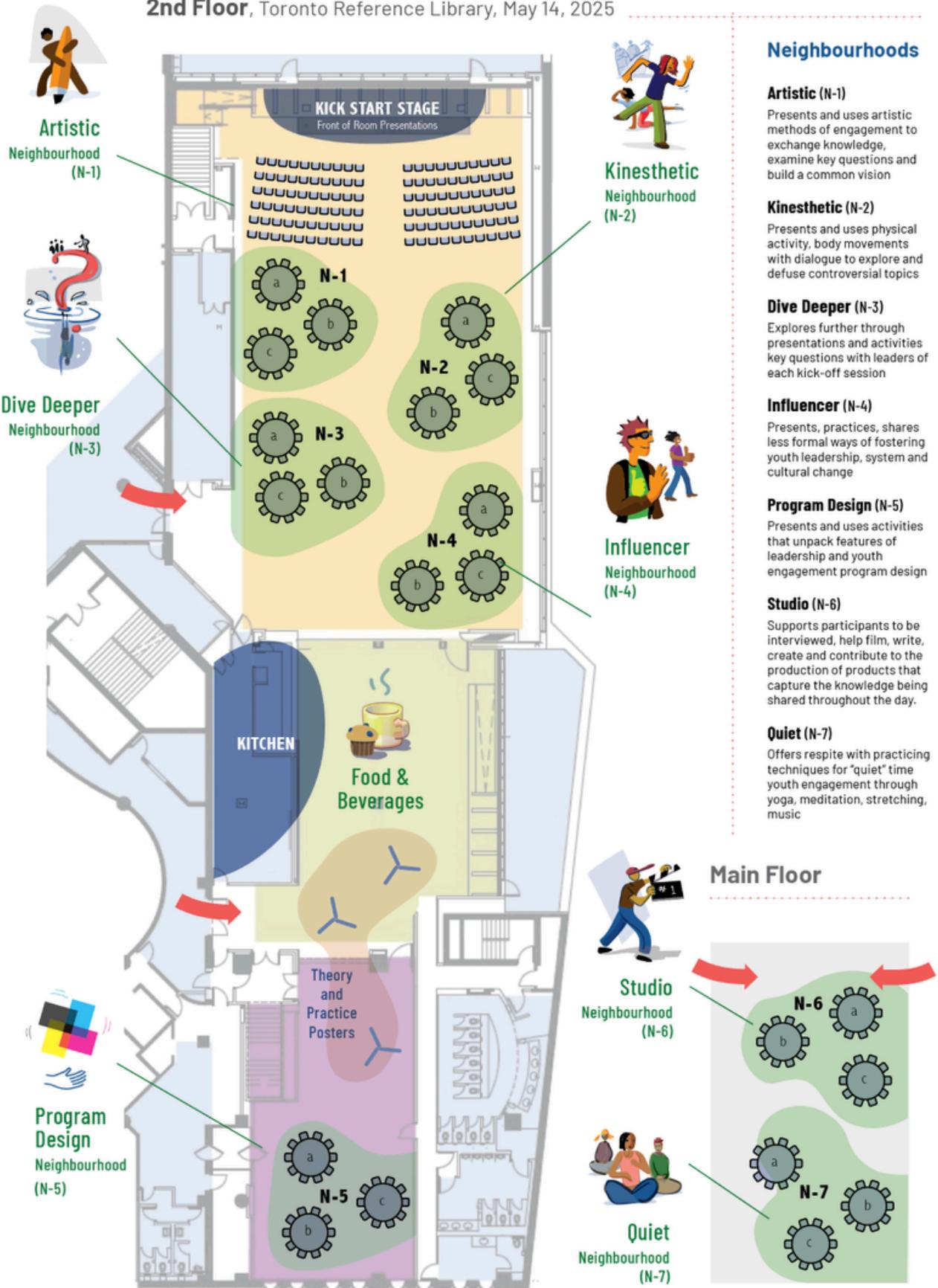
1. **Artistic Neighbourhood:** Uses creative methods (art, storytelling, performance) to examine key questions and build shared understanding.
2. **Kinesthetic Neighbourhood:** Uses physical movement and activity to explore complex or controversial leadership topics in an embodied way.
3. **Dive Deeper into Kick Start Neighbourhood:** Extends the kick start conversation with interactive discussions and activities led by the presenters.
4. **Influencer Neighbourhood:** Highlights grassroots and informal approaches to fostering youth leadership and systems change through real-world case studies.
5. **Program Design Neighbourhood:** Focuses on unpacking the building blocks of youth leadership programming, with hands-on tools and discussions.
6. **Studio Neighbourhood:** Offers participants a chance to help document the day—record interviews, create content, and contribute to collective knowledge mobilization.
7. **Quiet Neighbourhood:** Provides a space for rest and introspection through mindfulness practices like yoga, meditation, music, and gentle movement.

Throughout the day, you can also visit our Theory & Practice Poster Zone, where participants, academics, and community partners showcase models and research related to youth leadership and engagement. It's a great place to gather inspiration and take away tangible ideas.

# YOUTH LEADERSHIP VILLAGE

Exploring evidence, environments and techniques

2nd Floor, Toronto Reference Library, May 14, 2025



## Neighbourhoods

### Artistic (N-1)

Presents and uses artistic methods of engagement to exchange knowledge, examine key questions and build a common vision

### Kinesthetic (N-2)

Presents and uses physical activity, body movements with dialogue to explore and defuse controversial topics

### Dive Deeper (N-3)

Explores further through presentations and activities key questions with leaders of each kick-off session

### Influencer (N-4)

Presents, practices, shares less formal ways of fostering youth leadership, system and cultural change

### Program Design (N-5)

Presents and uses activities that unpack features of leadership and youth engagement program design

### Studio (N-6)

Supports participants to be interviewed, help film, write, create and contribute to the production of products that capture the knowledge being shared throughout the day.

### Quiet (N-7)

Offers respite with practicing techniques for "quiet" time youth engagement through yoga, meditation, stretching, music

# SESSION DETAILS

## **Nurturing and Nudging Youth Leadership**

A discussion about the functions of generativity, intergenerational partnership and tapping into existing youth agency for reciprocal leadership development.

**Heather Lawford**, PhD, Professor, Bishop's University, SSHRC TII Canada Research Chair, Youth Development, 3M National Teaching Fellow

**Sharif Mahdy**, Chief Executive Officer, The Students Commission of Canada

**Nola Charles**, Youth Leader, Vancouver Youth Strategy

**Mohamad Zaher Sharbaji**, Youth Leader, New Brunswick Teen Resource Centre

## **Nurturing Our Gifts: Cultural Approaches to Becoming First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Leaders**

Upstream parallel paths across the land: youth leaders' voices with stronger sense of self, cultural identity, pride, and a sense of direction, contributing to their communities for downstream results.

**Jennifer Markides**, PhD, SSHRC TII Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Youth Wellbeing and Education Associate Professor, Curriculum and Learning, Werklund School of Education & Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

**Leah Lizotte**, Human Resources Director, Beaver First Nation, Alberta

**Dominique Bloxom**, Traditional and emerging First Nations, Inuit and Métis leader

**Sky Scrimshaw**, Youth Leader from Beaver First Nation, Alberta

## **Leadership in Sports, Leisure and Recreation**

Discussion of opportunities and obstacles for youth leadership development in a variety of sport and recreational activities.

**Linda Rose-Krasnor**, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Brock University, Founding Academic Director of the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

**Victoria McLuckie**, with Cadets Olivia Lee-Wo and Lillian Veal

**Steven Whitaker**, Sports, Wellness and Achievement Network (SWAN)

## Challenging Power: Youth Leadership in System Change

An orientation to upstream youth engagement leadership and the importance of avoiding lifestyle drift in system change

**Tanya Halsall**, PhD, Scientist, University of Ottawa Institute of Mental Health Research at The Royal, Assistant Professor, School of Epidemiology and Public Health, University of Ottawa

**Amanda Bellefeuille**, Research Assistant, Carleton University

**Laurel Donison**

## Barriers to Youth Engagement in Leadership

An exploration of barriers existing at individual, family and community levels and the importance of resilience and safer spaces to create opportunity.

**Yana Berardini**, PhD, Assistant Professor, Child and Youth Studies, Trent University and member of the Centre of Excellence of Youth Engagement and the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence

**Matt Drabenstott**, PhD, Program and Research Fidelity Lead, The Students Commission of Canada

**Fiona Lacey**, Program Lead, Peer Support and Young Caregivers, The Ontario Caregiver Organization

**Rebekah A. Norman**, MA (She/Her), Research Coordinator and Relief Program Facilitator, Young Caregivers Association

## Cultivating Youth Changemakers & Closing Remarks

Understanding and supporting diverse leadership journeys, with a summary wrap-up.

**Heather Ramey**, CYW, PhD, Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University

**Sharif Mahdy**, Chief Executive Officer, The Students Commission of Canada