

YOUTH ACTION NOW:

Building a Multicultural Dialogue and Blueprint for Saskatchewan's Future

Project Overview

Introduction

The late Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, described multiculturalism as "an encounter of realities; difficult to accept at times and hard to practice." Yet, he said, this encounter of realities "has become the fabric of our life as a nation, the source of our individuality, and the very cornerstone of our identity as a people."

This fact holds particularly true here in Saskatchewan. Indeed, the provincial motto is, "From many peoples, strength." This is a province with a relatively small population and an incredibly diverse representation of people of many different races, cultures and faiths. 2001 census statistics show over 93 different ethnic origins represented in the roughly 969,000 people who call Saskatchewan home. It is also the only province in Canada, where the majority of the population is neither of French nor English descent. Even so, the people of Saskatchewan have over the years met many challenges and turned them into opportunities and, by doing so, have often been an example for the rest of the country.

An example of this is that in 1974, Saskatchewan became the first province in Canada to enact multiculturalism legislation. At that time, multiculturalism was defined primarily in terms of cultural retention. The *Saskatchewan Multiculturalism Act, 1997* reached beyond the traditional concept of multiculturalism to address the social justice issues of society such as racism, equity, and equal access to opportunity.

These achievements are not meant to mask the challenges that arise from those "encounters with reality". Barriers stemming from discrimination and misunderstanding continue to exist within our society and new ones appear as the province's demographic make-up changes. In recent years there has emerged an increasingly negative attitude by the province's youth towards the future of the province and their place in it. This is very unhealthy and discouraging for those who have worked so hard to build a tolerant and inclusive place to live.

In response to these trends, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress – Saskatchewan Provincial Council (UCC-SPC) has decided to bring its collective resources and experience together with those of the Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan (MCoS) in order to afford the youth of the province an opportunity to explore the cultural diversity of their home communities and province while undertaking a consultative process through which they will devise, discuss, debate and then deliver a blueprint for action for Saskatchewan's future. This blueprint will focus on three outcomes: Multicultural Connectivity (expanded opportunities for youth to become engaged in the multicultural community); Multicultural Awareness = Opportunities (greater awareness and respect of other cultures and expanded capability to open doors to more opportunities for youth) and Increased

Global Perspectives (raised awareness by educational institutions for youth). It will contain recommendations for Saskatchewan leaders (political, business and community) reflecting more youth-positive policies and programs encompassing multiculturalism and diversity. It will also provide a charter calling for commitments to implement the blueprint as well as guidelines for community-based actions, which respond to the youth-devised blueprint.

In addition to the project partners UCC-SPC and MCoS, the project foresees the involvement of other ethno-cultural organizations such as the Conseil culturel fransaskois and Saskatchewan German Council and possibly other youth organizations such as Street Culture Kids.

Developing YAN

In preparing this application, UCC-SPC and MCoS undertook a series of professionally facilitated Youth Action Now consultative workshops in the spring of 2003. These workshops were sponsored by Canadian Heritage. The goal was to solicit input and feedback as well as measure interest from youth representing various ethno-cultural communities for the project. Over the course of a few weekends in March, over 35 youth from across Saskatchewan were engaged in interactive activities which, in the end, offered the partners a clearer understanding of where the youth wished to see the project go and the outcomes they would like to see achieved.

By taking this approach, UCC-SPC and MCoS were able to ensure the active involvement of those most affected by the project, namely the province's ethno-cultural youth. The process was also able to enlist a broad a range of relevant organizations which may be called upon later to take on a role in its implementation. Finally, this prepared UCC-SPC and MCoS to manage the project as the roles and responsibilities of the implementation team were laid out.

The Youth Action Now project will enable the province's youth to voice their concerns for the future of their province by means of extensive province-wide consultations. It will be an example of how young people, regardless of background, can come together to become active members of society and affect change and contribute to its growth, dynamism and cultural diversity.

So how does the Youth Action Now initiative meet the objectives of the Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism Program? One of the ways is through its ability to raise public awareness and understanding of the importance of multiculturalism diversity and inclusiveness for the province while facilitating the discussion by Saskatchewan residents. Youth Action Now will also develop strategies, to promote the full and active participation of ethno-cultural communities while being sensitive to and reflecting cultural differences. These will be strategies for capacity building and youth empowerment developed through discussion and consensus building. Finally YAN intends to begin the long process of changing youth attitudes towards Saskatchewan, instilling a more positive outlook towards the province's future.

Expected Results and Evaluation

We all know that attitudes are hard things to change so the overall impact that this project could have is tremendous if one considers how much good a shift in attitude amongst the province's youth would do. We want the province's youth to once again see Saskatchewan as the dynamic, respectful and culturally diverse place to live and work that it is. As a result of such a change, one could expect expanded opportunities for youth to become engaged in the multicultural community, greater support and understanding of multicultural programming, increased tolerance of racial, ethnic and other minorities, a broader world perspective with more cultural interchange, more job opportunities as youth would be more adaptable and capable of working in different cultural environments and increased investment in the province as foreign companies find a welcoming climate in which to do business.

So how do we do this? The YAN Logic Model gives us some of the answers. We have already determined that our target audience is Saskatchewan youth and along with them provincial educational institutions as they are the logical arenas for such discussion. Joining them will be Saskatchewan's leaders (government, business and community) as they too are stakeholders. How will they be affected? We can expect to see a ripple effect as young people choose to remain in their communities and begin to take on more responsibilities for affecting positive change. We can expect to see community and other leaders begin to pay more heed to the concerns of the youth as they see a willingness to cooperate and we can expect to see our schools begin to provide even more opportunities for students to learn about world cultures, explore different perspectives while encouraging a greater sense of responsibility to being global citizens and consequently take a greater interest in what goes on in the world.

A number of specific measurable accomplishments have been detailed and form a good part of the expected results of the project. These include: an interactive web site; a baseline survey of youth attitudes towards multiculturalism and diversity; the successful holding of 19 youth forums and one major provincial gathering involving well over 5,000 youth, a Blueprint for Action; a higher profile for multiculturalism and diversity programming, a number of cultural showcases held across the province, greater cooperation among the province multicultural community, particularly youth, better understanding among youth of the diversity that exists in their communities, regions, province.

How can we be so sure? Much effort has been made to involve youth in the project development and the feedback they provided has been incorporated into the project format. It also influenced the direction the project has taken. Nor does this involvement end with the application process. The project design very much shines the light on youth and offers them opportunities for engagement and leadership skill development. A good example of this can be seen in the project management structural model where one can see the important roles to be played by Saskatchewan youth in the realization/ implementation of the Youth Action Now initiative.

Action Plan

Project Timeline

Phase One – Start-Up - September 15, 2003 to March 31, 2004

Phase Two – Youth Consultation Forums - April 1, 2004 to March 31, 2005

Phase Three – The Gathering and the Blueprint - April 1, 2005 to June 30, 2005

Phase Four – Putting Words into Action - July 1, 2005 to November 2005

i. Phase One – Start-up- September 15, 2003 to March 31, 2004

The proposed start date for the Youth Action Now project is September 15, 2003 with an expected completion period of 27 months. Phase One of the project, September 2003 to March 2004, will focus on project start-up and include the hiring of project staff (by November 1), a public media launch of YAN (early December 2003), establishment of the youth advisory committee (early January 2004), development of a marketing strategy (March 2004), commencement of project web site development work (February 2004), identification of youth project leaders as well as the hosting of train-the-trainer workshops (January to March 2004). This training for selected youth will enable them to later facilitate the nineteen province-wide Youth Action Now workshops to take place during Phase Two.

Ensuring a high public profile for YAN is very important. A public launch of the project, besides introducing the YAN partners and implementation team, would also provide opportunity to give profile to Canadian Heritage and the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism for their commitment to this project. Budgetary provision for this public event has been made under the project promotion category. Additionally this event will assist in creating interest and building project momentum.

Train-the-trainer is a key component for the implementation of the project as it will involve the very youth who will travel the province and facilitate the youth forum dialogues around the project's themes. The train-the-trainer component was included specifically to build capacity within the participating cultural communities and allow their youth to gain important leadership and facilitation skills.

ii. Phase Two – Youth Consultation Forums - April 1, 2004 to March 31, 2005

It is during this second phase that a great deal of the work and information gathering will take place. The process will commence in September 2004 with the hosting of two forums focusing on the youth (16-25 year olds) from Saskatchewan's ethno-cultural communities. These will be followed by 15 high-school based forums taking place over 5 weeks in October and November across the province and representing urban, rural, reserve, north, south, east, and west regional schools. Participants will be students in grades eleven and twelve. A central school will be identified in each of Saskatchewan's five main educational regions along with two satellite schools in each. It is the intent that the workshops will actual allow for some sort of electronic hook-up between the central

and satellite schools permitting more interaction and a more diverse regional representation.

The final format of these day-long forums will be determined by the project management team together with the Youth Action Now youth consultation committee consisting of approximately 10 youth advisors representing UCC-SPC, MCoS and other provincial multicultural organizations. The format will, however, reflect the general ideas put forward by participants during the March 2003 YAN workshops and in their Innovative Ideas document. More importantly, they will be built around the project's three direct outcomes: Multicultural Connectivity (expanded opportunities for youth to become engaged in the multicultural community); Multicultural Awareness = Opportunities (greater awareness and respect of other cultures and expanded capability to open doors to more opportunities for youth) and Increased Global Perspectives (raised awareness by educational institutions for youth).

The final two forums will take place in early 2005 and will be aimed at students of post-secondary institutions including the province's two universities and the Saskatchewan Institute for Applied Arts and Science (SIAST). In this manner a broad cross-section of Saskatchewan's youth population will have been consulted and engaged in the process.

Youth forums will serve to generate information, recommendations, feedback and input materials to be later utilised during the provincial YAN Gathering to take place in the spring of 2005 some of which will be incorporated into the final Blueprint for Action document.

An important component of the youth forums and a mechanism to ensure broader community involvement will be the forum finale – in essence a multicultural celebration meant to bring students together with local member of the multicultural community to celebrate the diversity that exists in each community. For few hours in the evening, music, dancing, singing and the smell of food will fill the auditoriums of the host schools. What better way to provide a positive reinforcement for local multicultural communities and students who are involved in those communities. They will serve as a showcase of local youth multicultural talent and act as a bridge between the students and the community.

iii. Phase Three – The Gathering and the Blueprint - April 1, 2005 to June 30, 2005

In the spring of 2005, representatives of Saskatchewan's cultural, political, business and community leadership will descend on the city of Regina to join over 150 youth participants for a weekend of dialogue, interchange, debate and information gathering. The Gathering will also bring in youth representatives from Manitoba, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories to broaden the scope of the discussions.

Festivities will begin Friday evening with a an official welcome and perhaps a keynote address by a special guest followed by a social event highlighting some of the community's youth talent. Saturday will see a variety of interactive workshops facilitated by youth leaders and/or some of the invited experts. Keynote addresses can be expected

from government leaders during lunch and dinner banquets and an evening high-tech “virtual global village” celebration of world cultures would complete the day.

During the Gathering, delegates will examine the initial recommendations stemming from the youth consultation forums held the previous fall and winter. Through this broadening of the participation to encompass government, business and community leaders participants will be able to share their concerns and further develop their ideas with the input from the other stakeholders. Incorporated into the Gathering weekend, will be the participation national experts or prominent young Canadians/mentors as keynote speakers, opportunities for panel discussions and interactive workshops

Throughout this process, materials will be generated which will be gathered, analysed then compiled by a writer who will then prepare a final version of the Blueprint for Action for publication and presentation on 27 June 2005 - Canada’s Multiculturalism Day.

iv. Phase Four – Putting Words into Action - July 1, 2005 to November 2005

It is during this final phase of the Youth Action Now project where we will see the start of the implementation of the Blueprint’s recommendation and, again, it is youth who will take the lead. Monies from the project will be earmarked to help fund initiatives in communities across Saskatchewan whose objectives are to bring about positive change by bringing to fruition aspects of the Blueprint for Action. The Canada Summer Games will take place at this time in Regina and could provide another opportunity for the work of the province’s youth on this project to be showcased.

By this point, people will have been engaged through the variety of activities that the project has undertaken over the previous number of months and so the final phase will be able to build on the project’s momentum and should result in very interesting, creative and relevant proposals coming forth for implementation.

Mention needs also to be made to the fact that the Youth Action Now project includes the development of an interactive web site through which visitors will be able to stay up-to-date on project activities, learn about community and/or youth groups and even provide electronically for surveys/chats/etc. It is hoped the site can be working by the end of phase one, although it will certainly be a work in progress for the length of the project.

Conclusion

Saskatchewan and Canada's growing ethno-cultural diversity requires making certain adjustments to ensure that all Canadians can participate fully in our society. Multiculturalism policy and its programs provide one way of helping make these adjustments. The policy enables the integration of minority Canadians while encouraging our institutions to remove discriminatory barriers to employment, service delivery, and civic participation.

The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* encourages the full participation of all Canadians in every aspect of Canadian society. The Act is designed to prevent whole communities in our society from being marginalized.

It is also true that as Canada's ethnic make-up changes those groups, which have been a part of the Canadian cultural tapestry almost to the time of the founding of the country should not be forgotten nor ignored. They still have much to offer and a project such as Youth Action Now will allow communities such as the Ukrainian community to share its experience with the newer communities, in this way helping to ensure continuity in Canada and Saskatchewan's tolerant and inclusive approaches to facing challenges.

There is much Saskatchewan is capable of, so much that its multicultural community can do to contribute to a strong and prosperous future and the Youth Action Now project and its partnering organizations, UCC-SPC and MCoS aims to play an important role in the province's continuing development.

To quote Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson, on a recent visit to the province:

"Nobody knows what's going to happen. Uncertainty and rumour reign. So what we can do is to hang on to the values that have always made up what we are: values to which Saskatchewan has contributed so much, and which the rest of Canada must not forget.

"It was in Saskatchewan that you taught us to believe that the public good could manifest itself in helping all citizens, no matter what their income or background... You taught us that we are all part of each other and that, collectively, we can be more than what we are as one selfish individual or even as one happy family.

The goals of the Youth Action Now project are large: empowering youth to become active citizens and engage their peers and the broader community in a discussion of multiculturalism, diversity and building a dynamic, inclusive and culturally tolerant province. But as the Governor-General states, we are all part of each other and together we can be more than we are a one individual. The homework has been done and the plans and partnering organizations in place - the Youth Action Now project is ready to go. We look forward to hearing from the Department of Canadian Heritage in order to be able to move forward with this important initiative. The future depends on it!