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# Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada 2012

# SUMMARY REPORT



# Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada 2012: Summary Report

The Honourable Peter Kent, Canada's Minister of the Environment, hosted the sixth Minister's Round Table (MRT) on Parks Canada on January 16, 2012, at the Toronto International Film Festival Bell Lightbox in Toronto. This MRT was structured as a workshop designed to seek ideas and input on how to connect Canadian youth to their natural and cultural heritage through national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas.

The lives of youth are increasingly urban, technology-driven and fast-paced. Many do not have regular opportunities to experience nature or history. The number of youth visiting national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas does not reflect their proportion of the Canadian population. In fact, the average age of visitors to Canada's national treasures is over 50. On average, about one-third of our visitors are over 55 and, nationally, only 2 in 10 visitor parties tend to be families.

Parks Canada had identified some challenges in its programming and gaps in its visitor demographics for young Canadians. Recognizing this fact, the Agency sought to initiate the discussion of possible multilateral collaborations that would draw on the skills of Parks Canada and multiple organizations with a view to engaging tens of thousands of young Canadians in our country's natural and cultural heritage.

## The Workshop

Minister Kent opened the day with a word of welcome, followed by the statement of accountability by Parks Canada's Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Alan Latourelle. The participants then moved into a workshop space to begin the facilitated session. The theme discussed was "Connecting Canadian youth to the very essence of Canada through Parks Canada's places."





Thirty participants attended MRT 2012. They represented a range of public, not-for-profit and private sector organizations, with experience in the youth sector as well as the heritage, resource protection and tourism sectors. Non-governmental and business organizations with a social mandate focused on youth participated along with key stakeholders in the fields of youth engagement and healthy living. Additionally, there were eight young Canadian participants in attendance who were either associated with current partners of Parks Canada or engaged in Parks Canada's youth programming. These youth participated as full delegates in the workshop. The facilitators employed a few techniques common to group discovery and consensus-building exercises during the day. Central to their approach was the Consensus Workshop Method and the Focused Conversation Method. Small group activities borrowed from the World Café method focused the attention of participants on specific questions.

The main question being posed at the MRT: "What will it take for Parks Canada to engage tens of thousands of youth (13–18 years) in connecting with their history and natural environments with the essence of being Canadian?"

Other questions were posed and discussed by the group with a view to fully explore this point of inquiry; these included an exploration of the challenges and a definition of success to better understand the form of what the participants want to see as an end state. The overall vision of the workshop was summarized by the question: "What do we really want to see going on in 2016 as a result of engaging thousands of youth in connecting with Canada's nature and history?"

## Recommendations from the group

The discussion explored in great detail the concept of engaging large numbers of Canadian youth in Parks Canada places. Many specific ideas were tabled and are summarized in the following categories:

### Plan with Youth; Not for Youth

*"If we can reach a point where youth are perceived as leaders of today rather than leaders of tomorrow, that would flip things on its head; that would be our breakthrough."*

The participants clearly supported the idea of involving youth in a fundamental way in planning for youth engagement. The concept of a youth board that would advise Parks Canada in the planning of youth initiatives was identified by several participants. As well, youth-focused, two-way communication is necessary for a clear understanding of the youth sector.

### Recommendation on Youth Engagement

*Young Canadians must take on a leadership role in how Parks Canada engages their peers—the creation of a youth board is recommended to define goals and develop the strategic approaches to engaging youth.*

## Minister's Response to Recommendation

Parks Canada has initiated work to engage youth who will provide advice and guidance to the Agency on the subject of youth engagement by leveraging existing programs, new technologies and social media channels.

One such initiative is the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge Parks Canada Youth Ambassadors program. The ambassadors will inspire young Canadians to be active, get outdoors and learn more about their natural and cultural treasures.

In addition, Parks Canada has begun work with its summer students and young employees to generate ideas about youth programming and effective youth engagement. These suggestions, along with those generated by the Parks Canada ambassadors' growing networks, will ensure that youth are indeed involved in planning Parks Canada's youth programming.

The youth sector in Canada has many organizations with complementary goals and objectives to Parks Canada. They have credibility, contacts and expertise in an area that is largely outside of Parks Canada's previous experience. Parks Canada has a portfolio of magnificent places that are ideal for bringing Canada's human and natural heritage to Canadian youth. By working with these organizations, Parks Canada will be drawn into the heart of the youth sector. Working in true collaboration, we can develop programming that youth endorse and find relevant.

## Recommendation on Partnerships and Collaboration

Parks Canada needs to work in a truly collaborative manner with organizations that are active with youth in order to maximize the reach and programming of all interested parties.

## Minister's Response to Recommendation

Moving ahead in the youth sector, wherever possible, Parks Canada will continue to establish multi-partite relationships with organizations having complementary goals so as to build on the strengths and opportunities presented by the various actors in this sector.

These kinds of relationships have already been employed at the national level by Parks Canada for programs such as My Parks Pass and the Canada's Coolest School Trip contest. For My Parks Pass, Parks Canada has been working with Nature Canada and Historica-Dominion Institute, two non-governmental organizations with shared objectives. My Parks Pass included the promotional contest Canada's Coolest School Trip which was delivered through a multi-partite collaboration that included Parks Canada and private sector partners Brewster Travel Canada, Banff Lake Louise Tourism Bureau and Air Canada.

Moving ahead, Parks Canada will strive to develop tools to ensure multi-partite relationships are used to support youth initiatives and will continue to build on and enhance existing programs and relationships.



## Building on the Strengths of Each Other

*"With all of these organizations working together, engaging tens of thousands of youth is not an audacious goal. It can be done."*

## Hit the Books: Connecting with the Formal Education System

*“The formal education system is as close to a universal social program as can be found in Canada. It touches practically every Canadian child and has near total penetration in the youth market.”*

The formal education system touches the vast majority of Canadian youth and, as a result, is targeted by many organizations wishing to engage youth. There already exists a strong cohort of potential partners who have strong connections

with the provincial education systems; partners who work closely with educators to produce and provide innovative and dynamic learning opportunities to Canadian students.

### Recommendation on Engaging the Formal Education System

Parks Canada should work with organizations that have a significant reach in the formal education system in moving ahead with proactive youth engagement. In this way, Parks Canada can multiply its reach while continuing to have a presence in schools.

### Minister’s Response to Recommendation

Parks Canada currently has a number of national-level agreements with organizations that are active in the formal education system. The potential for expanding these with a view to fostering a greater connection between youth and their national heritage will be further explored in conjunction with relevant partners.

Although formal education is a provincial responsibility, connecting to this sector has long been important for Parks Canada. Parks Canada places provide an ideal context for hands-on learning and we will continue to encourage class trips to Canada’s national treasures.

Agreements with partners such as Historica-Dominion Institute and the Royal Canadian Geographical Society allow Parks Canada and these partners to achieve mutual objectives with respect to conveying understanding and appreciation of Canada’s cultural and natural heritage to the nation’s youth. These organizations have long supported Canadian educators and, as a result, they have a reach that extends into Canada’s classrooms. Parks Canada places are genuine examples that touch on the foundations of Canada.

Parks Canada will continue to work with all relevant partners in order to reach students everywhere across the country. The Agency’s learning and education initiatives will continue to hold an important place among various youth initiatives. Our strategy on learning and education will be reviewed to ensure ongoing relevance and the capacity to deliver relevant experiential learning to Canadian students. These kinds of relationships have already been employed at the national level by Parks Canada for programs such as My Parks Pass and the Canada’s Coolest School Trip contest. For My Parks Pass, Parks Canada has been working with Nature Canada and Historica-Dominion Institute, two non-governmental organizations with shared objectives. My Parks Pass included the promotional contest Canada’s Coolest School Trip which was delivered through a multi-partite collaboration that included Parks Canada and private sector partners Brewster Travel Canada, Banff Lake Louise Tourism Bureau and Air Canada.

Moving ahead, Parks Canada will strive to develop tools to ensure multi-partite relationships are used to support youth initiatives and will continue to build on and enhance existing programs and relationships.

## Dream It – Live It!

*“Instead of figuring out how we need to change them (youth), we need to figure out how to change our own organizations to work for them.”*

There are many barriers keeping youth out of national parks and national historic sites. Often these locations are remote from their homes; youth do not necessarily feel welcome; or they cannot afford to make the trip, as a family or as individuals. These places can be made more accessible in many ways. The potential exists to work with partners to improve accessibility from a personal finance point of view or by working together to produce package travel products that include national park or national historic site admission.

The establishment of Rouge National Urban Park will provide youth in Toronto access to local natural settings. Youth will be able to travel to the Rouge using the means of transport they already use independently on a day-to-day basis. This is an example of a park that will break down an important barrier to youth, and other solutions will be explored on how Parks Canada can create youth-friendly experiences with less barriers moving ahead.

As well, the activities that are traditionally undertaken in national parks and national historic sites may be intimidating. By offering non-traditional activities that youth already partake in (such as concerts), they get to have an experience that appeals to them and the barrier to access is reduced.

### Recommendation on Incentives and Accessibility

Recognize the barriers to youth participation and actively work toward eliminating them, and encourage youth interaction with Parks Canada places and activities.

### Minister’s Response to Recommendation

As mentioned in the response to the first recommendation, the establishment of an active dialogue with youth will be instrumental in identifying barriers to youth engagement and defining appropriate solutions.

There are initiatives under way that seek to reduce the barriers between youth and Parks Canada places. My Parks Pass is a program aimed at every Grade 8 and Secondary 2 student in Canada. It allows free entry to students and provides incentives to their families. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge Parks Canada Youth Ambassador program is also being launched. This program will see two youth ambassadors taking the Parks Canada message to places and through channels that already engage Canadian youth.

Parks Canada will strive to identify and implement onsite and outreach activities that enable and encourage youth participation at national parks and national historic sites. More and more non-traditional activities are being designed for specific clienteles at Parks Canada and future programming will better suit the interests of youth. Also, recognizing young Canadians are among the most techno-savvy people in the world, Parks Canada will explore ways to enhance the online experience to better meet the needs of young Canadians.





## Media as a Multiplier

*“Not everyone will be able to go to these places; it’s a big country and technology can be your friend as opposed to your enemy. It is easy to default to the easy measurable: attendance at the gate. For this ultimate goal of tens of thousands, initially they may not be people who enter through the gates of the park—rather, there is continuum of experience that will ultimately get them coming through the gates.”*

Daily, youth use a variety of media. This provides access points Parks Canada can use to reach these youth online or on television. Parks Canada has the opportunity to take advantage of these channels but must recognize youth access media producers that are not necessarily traditional partners of Parks Canada; we have to go where they are and not where we normally go.

### Recommendation on Engaging Youth through Media

Work closely with media channels that successfully reach youth to ensure the Parks Canada story is delivered to substantial numbers of youth.

### Minister’s Response to Recommendation

Parks Canada will continue to pursue programming that extends the reach of Canada’s heritage places to the places where Canadians live, work and play via television, print media and digital media among others.

Current activities in the development of new media will continue with an emphasis on synchronizing even more with the needs and interests of young Canadians. Parks Canada will work with multiple partners wherever possible in the production and distribution of new media with the intention of ensuring the Agency’s reach is extended as broadly as possible.

Parks Canada recognizes youth are leaders in Canada today and engaging youth broadens the capacity of the organization as well as its reach. Fully involving youth will allow Parks Canada to better meet the evolving demands of our society in ways that complement the needs, interests and ambitions of Canadians today and in the future.

# Closing Statements

Minister Kent brought the day to its conclusion by thanking the participants for their involvement and acknowledging that youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow, they can and should be engaged as leaders today. In this context, Minister Kent indicated that youth need to be involved in the establishment of strategies for youth engagement and that he is taking away the message that youth want this type of participation. The Minister also noted that Parks Canada will continue to fulfill its responsibilities with respect to its mandate and protecting Canada's heritage resources, and will engage youth in fulfilling these roles, ensuring that young Canadians support and connect with their natural and historic heritage.

## Next Steps

In accordance with the legislated requirements under the Parks Canada Agency Act, the Minister will respond to the recommendations from MRT 2012 within 180 days, by July 14, 2012.

The Minister's Response to Recommendations will be available on Parks Canada's Web site ([www.parkscanada.gc.ca](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca)).

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*All quotes in this section were made by participants. Attribution is not currently defined.*