



**Youth Guide: Vernon and the Okanagan Indian Band
Youth Engagement Project**



Report Prepared for: the Vancouver Foundation

**Submitted by: The International Centre for Sustainable Cities
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A. Project Summary

The City of Vernon and the Okanagan Indian Band are joint members of the Sustainable Cities: PLUS Network, an international network of cities and regions working on long-term sustainability planning. As joint members the City and OKIB identified youth engagement as a top priority for their communities. With the support of the International centre for Sustainable Cities Youth-led Development Program, these two communities joined forces to conduct a community asset mapping and youth guide project. In January 2009, a Youth Engagement Coordinator was hired to facilitate the development of the Youth Guide and oversee asset mapping and visioning activities with the youth of the Okanagan Indian Band and Greater Vernon region.

As part of the engagement methods, the Youth Coordinator worked with Fulton Secondary School's Global Education Class to conduct peer to peer facilitated asset mapping and design of the youth guide. Other activities included photo visioning and community networking. During the four month project period, over 930 youth from these two communities engaged in mapping, visioning and voicing their ideas about community issues and resources. Their discussions ranged from issues of public transit to environmental concerns. For the purpose of this project, the target age range of youth was thirteen to eighteen years old. The Youth Guide was presented to the public during the Earth Day Celebration in the City of Vernon on April 22, 2009. Copies of the Youth Guide are available through the high schools in Vernon, the City of Vernon, the Okanagan Indian Band, and a variety of community centres in the Vernon area. The Youth Guide is also being made into a new, live website (www.youthcore.ca/vernon) where youth will be able to access online maps and information about resources and places for youth in the Greater Vernon region.

A detailed project summary and methodology is included in the appended Youth Guide Project Report by the project's Youth Coordinator Mariel Belanger.



Photo: High school students vision and discuss the ideal future in Vernon.

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Photo by Mariel Belanger: Students from the Global Education Class at Fulton Secondary School engage in a values and beliefs exercise during their visioning training workshop.

B. Results

The Youth Guide Project resulted in the engagement of 930 youth from Vernon and the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) in visioning, mapping, and planning for the future of their communities. Through hiring a Youth Coordinator to work on this project, we had anticipated engaging at least 25 youth from diverse backgrounds including immigrant, First Nations, and those with disabilities in the visioning and asset mapping project. By engaging over 35 times as many youth from all of these backgrounds, we far exceeded our hopes and initial targets for this project. As this project was a joint initiative with the OKIB, it was paramount to assure the engagement of First Nations youth. As a result, workshops were held with 13 OKIB youth from the Six Mile Education Centre and R'Native Voice program, 18 youth from the Sookinchoot Youth Centre and 12 youth from First Nations Studies 12 class at Seaton High School.

This major success is attributed to the Youth Coordinator using a train-the-trainer model to work with Fulton Secondary's Global Education Class and train students in that class as peer facilitators. The Global Education Class consists of a diverse group of youth from a variety of backgrounds and experiences that are interested in focusing some of their studies around community and global issues. Creating such a successful partnership with this class was a major lesson learned for this project and a strategic youth engagement method that we will endeavour to apply where possible in all future projects. Not only did the Global Education Class contribute to the engagement of a vast number of youth, the students also learned skills in facilitation, how to teach asset mapping and community visioning to other youth, project coordination and how to develop a youth guide. Through this project we also are working toward our goal of creating an electronic youth guide (website). An additional success outcome resulted from hosting a photo-visioning contest which produced several outstanding, thought-provoking entries prepared by Vernon area youth reflecting on their community.

Our biggest was having a staff person working on this project only part-time for four months. Using a contractor for such a project means that follow-up from this initiative is in the hands of busy City and Okanagan Indian Band staff. The City and OKIB team hope to continue to engage youth in their projects through partnerships such as that with the Global Education Class. The project team was fortunate because we hired an extremely motivated, self-directed individual as our Youth Coordinator. Her experience working with youth and her skills in facilitation enabled her to hit the ground running and pull off a phenomenal project in a short-period of time. Ideally, a Youth Coordinator should be hired on a continuous basis to assure the voices of youth continue to be engaged in community planning. Having a Youth coordinator employed beyond the duration of this project would also assure that youth continue to be made aware of the resources this project created including the Youth Guide and the youthcore.ca/vernon website. We found that having the Youth Coordinator working only on a part-time basis for a short-period of time made completing the photo visioning contest a bit of a challenge and more rushed than we anticipated. The entries for the contest were all outstanding, though there were less-entries than anticipated. In the future we would only do this activity if we had a longer-time frame.

C. Effect on Community and Organization

The primary change this project has created in Vernon and the Okanagan Indian Band is that both communities have successfully collaborated on a sustainability project to engage youth and build local 'social capital'. This partnership will assist the City and OKIB in creating and sustaining future partnerships as it was a huge success and illustrates that the two organizations can benefit from joint collaboration on community issues. This project has resulted in tools for youth engagement for the City and OKIB to use in the future, including a well-established partnership with the Global Education Class at Fulton Secondary School.

As a direct result of this project, youth from Vernon and the Okanagan Indian Band have been engaged in visioning and mapping their community. The Youth Guide will serve as a resource for youth in the community, including those that have just arrived in the area and are looking for activities and information. The youthcore.ca/vernon website can be easily updated and will serve as a virtual online resource for youth. The key will be for the City and the OKIB to continue to engage with the Fulton Secondary School Global Education Class to continue to keep the website, relevant, current and up to date and to spread the word and facilitate the ongoing use of youthcore.ca/Vernon. In a future project, it would be excellent to survey youth to find out how many of them are using the youthcore.ca/vernon website and how to assure that it remains an effective tool for organizations and youth to learn about activities in the community. With funding and staff capabilities, local programs and opportunities could be continuously updated on the website, so the website serves as a virtual 'One Stop Shop' for youth. At this point in time, we are hoping to add weblinks to organizations websites, along with a brief summary of organizational activities. This is dependent on the continued engagement of the Global Education Class to finish this website as our Youth Coordinator has finished her contract with the project.

This project has been instrumental in advancing the long-term plans of both the City of Vernon and the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) to include youth in their planning processes and make the Vernon area a youth-

friendly community. The meaningful engagement of youth is at the forefront of the agendas of both the City and OKIB councils. The Youth Guide as well as the tools for youth engagement will continue to be included in community planning processes through both the City and OKIB. We hope that the youth that were engaged with this project remain engaged in community planning and city issues. We anticipate the partnership between the City of Vernon, the OKIB and the Global Education Class continuing, diversifying and strengthening so that youth continue to be actively involved in community planning.

This project has also been an excellent case-study for the International Centre for Sustainable Cities (Sustainable Cities) to illustrate the effectiveness of peer-to-peer facilitation of youth engagement processes. Sustainable Cities will be showcasing this case-study, the methodology and the lessons learned in the production of an Asset Mapping Toolkit, which will be available for communities and organizations interested in engaging youth in sustainability planning. The project also added value and collaboration to our working relationship with both Vernon and the OKIB as joint members of the Sustainable Cities: PLUS Network.



Photo: During a mapping exercise, Vernon youth look at resources available in the region.

D. Inclusiveness

The Youth Guide Project engaged a diverse range of youth throughout the project. Our Youth Coordinator, Mariel Belanger is a member of the Okanagan Indian Band and a youth coordinator at Sookinchoot Youth Centre in Vernon. She actively engaged the twenty-two youth from the Global Education Class – a group of youth from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The Global Education Class acted as a project steering group, shaping and facilitating the entire process of the youth guide development. Through the peer-to-peer facilitation by the Global Education Class and youth engagement workshops Mariel held with the OKIB, Sookinchoot Youth Centre, Six Mile Education Centre and R'Native Voice, a diverse representation of Vernon and OKIB youth were engaged. These youth included youth-at-risk, those with disabilities, youth

from immigrant families, First Nations youth, and a diversity of other students within the school system. One of the lessons learned from this project is that City maps can be limited in their geographic scope for creating guides to youth services in more rural communities such as the City of Vernon. Some of the youth commented that city maps used for the visioning and asset mapping project did not cover the area where they live and thus limited the issues and services the youth could identify. Perhaps in future projects, use of Google Earth maps could assist in supplementing city maps.



Photo: Global Education Students facilitate a youth visioning and mapping workshop with a First Nations Studies class.

E. Factors Influencing Outcomes

The major success factors of this project were as follows:

- ❖ the partnership between the OKIB, the City of Vernon and the International Centre for Sustainable Cities to engage youth in city planning and supporting the project's Youth Coordinator through training and mentorship
- ❖ the funding support from the Vancouver Foundation and the Tweedledum Foundation for this initiative
- ❖ building on lessons learned from other cities and communities such as Dawson Creek, Iqaluit, Dar es Salaam, and the Tseshaht First Nations that have engaged youth in community planning through asset mapping and visioning
- ❖ hiring a dynamic, self-driven, motivated, and experienced Youth Coordinator to kick this project into high gear in short-order

- ❖ the Youth Coordinator's initiative to engage the Global Education Class as a key player in peer-to-peer facilitation of the visioning and mapping process for creation of the Youth Guide; this led to the engagement of far more youth than originally anticipated

This project was developed in partnership with the City Planning Department at the City of Vernon and the Community Development Officer at the Okanagan Indian Band. The project concept was based on youth engagement initiatives completed by staff at the International Centre for Sustainable Cities with other cities and First Nations both in Canada and internationally. The project was a direct result of the City and the OKIB expressing interest in engaging youth in community planning.

The project had two primary training components.

- 1) The training of the Youth Coordinator in facilitation, asset mapping, Youth Guide development, photo visioning and other visioning tools.
- 2) The training of the Global Education Class as peer-to-peer facilitators of this process.

These training components proved effective as our Youth Coordinator did an exceptional job of utilising these newly acquired tools with her existing skills working with youth to engage local youth in the project both as participants and facilitators of the broader initiative. Youth from the Global Education Class at Fulton Secondary School were given the tools and training to do asset mapping and visioning with their peers. The Global Education Class took the project on and took the initiative to facilitate the workshops with their peers. They directed the design and layout of the Youth Guide, as well as facilitating the process. In her final wrap-up of the project, the Youth Coordinator will be debriefing with the Global Education Class to discuss how the youth wish to continue to be involved in this project and follow-up actions they can take to improve their communities.



Photo by Mariel Belanger:
Youth from the Global
Education Class learn
how to do community
asset mapping for the
Youth Guide.



Photo: Global Education Students facilitate a youth mapping workshop with their peers as they work on the production of the Youth Guide.

F. Collaboration/Partnership

The partnership element of this project was fundamental to the success of this initiative. The OKIB, City of Vernon and International Centre for Sustainable Cities worked collaboratively on the development of the project, job posting, hiring and training of the Youth Coordinator, ongoing project support and mentoring, project logistics and in kind contributions to the project. Both the City of Vernon and the OKIB were involved in judging the entries for the photo visioning contest and in reviewing project material and drafts of the Youth Guide throughout the project.

The Youth Coordinator, representatives from the City of Vernon Planning Department, and the Youth-led Development Project Officer at the International Centre for Sustainable Cities debriefed the project on May 4, 2009. Unfortunately due to a sudden transition in staffing at the OKIB resulting from changes made by the newly elected Council, a staff member from the OKIB was not present at the project debrief. However, the Youth Coordinator will be presenting to the OKIB Council and a staff from the planning department at the City of Vernon will be available to attend this presentation to help facilitate continuity in the project partnership and working relationship. The Youth Coordinator will also be presenting the Youth Guide, winning entry in the photo visioning contest, and overall project results to the City of Vernon Council on June 8, 2009 and the City will extend an invitation for a staff representative from the OKIB to attend.

G. Publicity/Media

The project received a vast array of media coverage through the local news media in the City of Vernon. Several articles appeared in the *Morning Star* and the *Senklip News* (see attachment to this report).



Photo: Youth in a First Nations studies class create their vision for the Vernon area.

H. Evaluation Process

The project was evaluated both with the project partners during the debrief and Aboriginal youth participants from Sookinchoot Youth Centre. The project will also be evaluated with youth from the Global Education Class at Fulton Secondary School when they return from their volunteer work in Nicaragua later this month.

Project Partners:

During the debrief, the project partners had a focus-group style discussion about the project successes, shortcomings, and future directions. This evaluation was facilitated by the International Centre for Sustainable Cities. The project partners concluded that the biggest challenge to the project was the short-time frame. There are so many areas and issues with which to continue to engage youth and ultimately, this project could lead to the development of a youth strategy, youth council and subsequent community projects led by youth. Having a permanent youth coordinator position to facilitate this initiative would really help to take youth engagement to a higher level in the City of Vernon. The team agreed that the great success of the project was the engagement of so many youth in the community through the peer-to-peer model of facilitation.

The project partners present during the project evaluation meeting included the Manager of Planning and Buildings for the City of Vernon, an Assistant Planner with the City of Vernon, the Youth Coordinator and the Youth-led Development Project Officer from the International Centre for Sustainable Cities. As a project team, we were disappointed that our original project representative from the OKIB was not able to attend the meeting due to staff restructuring in the OKIB. However, he was engaged in the project until one week prior and thus frequently had mini-evaluations of the project with the Youth Coordinator.

We were pleased with this style of evaluation of the project, as the key people involved as partners are managers that are extremely busy and more apt to share ideas in a face-to-face meeting than through a survey or phone interview. We felt that we began the initiative as a team and doing the debrief and evaluation of the project as a team was key to celebrating success, reflecting on lessons learned and planning next steps.

The Global Education Class:

The Global Education Class at Fulton Secondary School has been on a three-week volunteer exchange trip in Nicaragua and thus we are still awaiting the opportunity to debrief with them and hear their evaluations of their participation in the project. Our Youth Coordinator will be debriefing with the class both in a group setting and by having them do a group evaluation of the project with our Youth Coordinator and fill out online surveys using Survey Monkey. We look forward to hearing their feedback through this formal evaluation. Through ongoing conversations during the project, the Youth Coordinator was met with a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement about the project and the opportunity to partner with the City and the OKIB.

Aboriginal Youth:

The Youth Coordinator had the opportunity to meet with Aboriginal youth at the Sookinchoot Youth Centre during the photo visioning exercise. Those youth were extremely interested in the photo visioning aspect of the project and contributing their ideas through a fun, innovative method. Some of the youth, considered high-risk youth, did note that their immediate concerns involved meeting their day-to-day needs of food, shelter and activities and that visioning about the community was a big picture activity not immediately imminent to their needs. They expressed concern that their ideas would just be ideas and not directly result in changes. This highlights the importance of both the City and the OKIB illustrating the continuity in this project by engaging with youth on an ongoing basis and making regular announcements through the schools, youth organizations, and media about opportunities for youth to collaborate on community projects with the City and the OKIB.

Actions resulting from the ideas presented by the youth need to be shown as linked to the Youth Guide project. In a sense, the project needs to be 'branded' so that youth can see the continuity and the meaningful aspects of their contributions. One way that the youth will see the direct result of their input and feedback is through the print and electronic versions of the Youth Guide that are being distributed to all participating organizations, schools and the youth facilitators.

I. Advisory Committee Goals

This project was funded by the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee at the Vancouver Foundation. We are pleased to confirm that our project met each of the advisory committee's goals.

Committee Goals:

- 1) promote community initiatives that address basic needs of children, youth and families including adequate food, health care, shelter and social supports**
 - the youth visioning and asset mapping project identified youth needs in the community and provided a guide to services and support for youth
 - the Youth Guide will help youth and their families to meet their basic needs through accessing services and support available in the community

- 2) promote projects which enhance the self-esteem, leadership skills and life skills of children, youth and families both individually and as a whole**
 - this project trained youth as peer facilitators to engage their fellow youth in the Vernon region on identifying their vision for their community's future, the issues impacting youth, and resources and assets available to young people
 - twenty-two youth facilitators were empowered to lead this project as facilitators – a process contributing to leadership skill development and improving the self-esteem of the facilitators and participants
 - this exercise resulted in youth working collaboratively to think about their personal values, their hopes and dreams for the future of their community, and the resources available in their community

- 3) support culturally sensitive initiatives within communities and those that promote full access to services for children, youth and families**
 - this project engaged youth from a diversity of backgrounds (socio-economic, ability, and ethnicity) in identifying the services and resources available in their community and where they can be accessed
 - this project promoted youth thinking about aspects of the city that are important to them and mapping them in a youth guide; the primary focus of the guide was on places for youth to go and recreational opportunities for young people in the Vernon area

4) promote activities for children, youth and families that lead to a better understanding of diversity

- this project was a partnership between the City of Vernon and the Okanagan Indian Band and included a large number of Aboriginal youth, youth from immigrant families, and youth with disabilities
- youth from all different ethnicities worked collaboratively on this project as facilitators and participants and our Youth Coordinator is a member of the Okanagan Indian Band
- this project promoted a better understanding of diversity by bringing together youth from a variety of backgrounds to think about the future in their community and the issues, challenges, and values of youth
- we hired a female Aboriginal Youth Coordinator as a positive role model and facilitator

5) promote development of the innate capacities of individuals and families, as well as their communities, to grow and adapt to change

- through the visioning and values exercises, this project assisted the youth in identifying their hopes and dreams for the future in their community
- by engaging youth in thinking about the issues impacting their community, their vision for the future and actions to address their concerns, this project will enable the individual participants to assist their communities and themselves in not only adapting to change, but creating the changes in their community that they think are important for the future in Vernon, the OKIB and surrounding area

J. Future of the Project

The purpose of this project was to assist the City of Vernon and the OKIB to launch into ongoing engagement of youth in community planning initiatives. By engaging youth in visioning and asset mapping, the City and OKIB gained a better understanding of the issues impacting youth and tools for effective engagement of youth. The peer-to-peer facilitation model proved extremely effective and can be applied to future youth engagement initiatives and community planning projects. The City of Vernon anticipates using this model in an upcoming community consultation process around planning for the development of the centre of the City. The Team is hopeful that the partnership with the Global Education Class will continue and that they will be able to build upon the momentum generated by the Youth Guide project. Ideally, this class would stay engaged with the City and OKIB and continue to engage their peers in city planning on an ongoing basis. One suggestion presented by the Youth Coordinator is that the OKIB support the participation of at least one youth in the Global Education Class per year. As well as working on youth engagement in partnership with the City of Vernon, the OKIB can also implement the peer-to-peer facilitation model for engaging youth in their community.

In terms of next steps for this project, the City and the OKIB plan to employ the tools utilized for youth engagement in this project in other community initiatives. The City would like to have a permanent youth coordinator to continue to engage youth on community planning initiatives on an ongoing basis but cannot due to budget constraints.

This is an idea that is even more on the radar of the City now that this project has finished. Further to this, next steps for the City include meeting with the teachers heading the Global Education Class to determine possibilities for long-term partnerships with the class. There are also potential opportunities to partner with Social Studies 10 teachers at each of the schools as local governance is a new component in the curriculum and teachers are looking to the City for resources and curriculum material.

The City would like to work with youth to develop a youth strategy for ongoing engagement and to assist youth in taking the lead on their project ideas to address community challenges. As a follow on from this idea, the City is interested in establishing a Youth Council that would assure the continued engagement of youth in city issues and would take action on sustainability projects in the community. Both of these initiatives require a budget and dedicated staff time to support their development. The City plans to continue to engage youth as much as possible in upcoming projects and to work with youth to update the Youth Guide as needed. The City will be looking for funding sources in addition to City Council to support the continued engagement of youth.

As far as additional follow-up from the OKIB, with the sudden shift in Council and staffing, we are not sure how the OKIB will follow-up from this project. There is a push among the OKIB Council to engage youth, so the upcoming presentation at an OKIB Council meeting will be critical. The City and the OKIB are joint members of the Sustainable Cities PLUS Network (international network of cities and communities working on long-term sustainability planning). This partnership will provide and encourage opportunities for future collaboration.

K. Anecdotal Comments

“We see this project as a starting point for continued youth engagement in the City. We are on the path we wanted to get on and are feeling very encouraged. We can’t let this fade away now that the project is wrapping up. We need to focus on how we move forward,” – Kim Flick, Manager of Planning and Buildings, City of Vernon.

“The way our Youth Engagement Coordinator approached youth and engaged them as peer facilitators is a great model. The lessons learned from this project will be very helpful for me in my work. If I had used these ideas in our youth engagement efforts for our OCP I am sure the process would have been much more effective,” – Dean Strachan, Assistant Planner, City of Vernon.

“These are issues that are very close to my heart, so I will want to continue to stay engaged with this project even after it has wrapped-up. I think that this is a good starting point, we just have to make sure that the ball isn’t dropped and that the youth see that their ideas are continuing to be heard and action is resulting,”
-Mariel Belanger, Youth Coordinator, Vernon/OKIB Project.

“This project will provide an excellent case-study for us to share with other members of the Sustainable Cities PLUS Network. Regina, for example has, contacted us wanting to develop a similar youth engagement project and learn from the lessons of Vernon and the OKIB,” – Amber Zirnhelt, Project Officer, Sustainable Cities.

“The youth were well informed and knew what they were talking about,”

-Aboriginal Support Worker on the peer facilitators workshop with the First Nations Studies Class.

“Very adult like conversation, realistic. Students remained on task during the workshop,”

–First Nations Studies teacher.

“To be ourselves, who we were made to be,” – OKIB youth on a vision for the future.

* Please Note: The majority of our quotes from youth are included in the Youth Coordinator’s report: *Youth Guide Project Report* and are focused on their views about community needs and hopes for the future. Additional quotes will be added from the youth participants from the upcoming evaluation session the Youth Coordinator will be holding with the Global Education Class.

L. Budget

This project has been delivered on budget. Please refer to the budget included in the appendices of this report.

M. Conclusion

This project has exceeded all of our expectations. It has been a great success and has assisted us in identifying youth peer facilitation as an innovative method for engaging large numbers of youth in community planning. As an organization, the International Centre for Sustainable Cities will encourage other communities to follow-suit to develop a strong partnership with classes, teachers, student councils and leadership programs within the high schools. On future projects of similar nature, we will plan to extend the time-frame for the project. The existing time frame was adequate to do the Youth Guide Project, but proved to be rushed for including the photo visioning contest and for ensuring sustainability beyond the project. Overall the project was completed to very high standards in a short-amount of time – a mission accomplished by having an outstanding Youth Coordinator for the project.

The Vernon/OKIB Youth Guide project has already been looked to as a model for youth engagement by other communities. The Cooperators and the City of Regina(another member of the PLUS Network), have contacted the International Centre for Sustainable Cities to learn more about youth engagement and the Vernon/OKIB Youth Guide Project. We are currently working on developing a similar project with the City of Regina that will build on the lessons learned from the Vernon/OKIB Project.

This project will be showcased on the City of Vernon’s new sustainability monitoring website (SEE-IT), which will be launched by the fall of 2009. This will enable citizens to track all of the youth engagement initiatives undertaken by the City, as well as other sustainability initiatives happening as part of the City’s OCP. The OKIB plans to include the Youth Guide and project report on their website as well, but this may experience a slight delay due to internal restructuring.

At the International Centre for Sustainable Cities, we are currently working in partnership with LifeCycles on the development of a Youth Mapping and Visioning Toolkit. This

Toolkit will be available for all communities and organizations who are interested in engaging youth in city planning or community projects. We will be highlighting the Vernon/OKIB case-study as an example of an innovative approach to youth engagement through peer-to-peer facilitation.

The Vernon/OKIB Youth Guide Project demonstrates that direct engagement of youth in leading and facilitating community planning, mapping, and visioning processes creates ownership among youth in projects. In turn, such ownership in community issues and visioning, helps to assure that young people are engaged in their community from a young age.