



#CanadaWeWant #leCanadaquenoussohaitons

NATIONAL YOUTH MOVEMENT | MOUVEMENT NATIONAL DES JEUNES



International Experience Canada Conference Report



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

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RBC Future Launch

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the International Experience Canada theme team from the #CanadaWeWant 2021 Virtual Youth Conference. International Experience Canada (IEC) is a Government of Canada program that provides Canadian citizens aged 18 to 35 with the opportunity to work and travel abroad, by offering youth a path to a work permit or visa in one of over 30 countries and territories. As a reciprocal program, youth citizens from partner countries can do the same in Canada. Taking part in the IEC program allows youth to gain valuable international work experience which can take their career to the next level. It also helps develop life-long connections and helps strengthen Canada's place in the global workforce. Youth can experience the world while they work to discover their strengths and inspiration.

IEC has been a key contributor to the #CanadaWeWant Conference and youth movement since 2019. Previous conference reports identified ways to make the IEC experience more accessible for diverse groups of youth. The 2021 conference focused on identifying post-pandemic strategies to support youth in feeling safe and comfortable travelling abroad for work and travel experiences. The IEC theme team identified a set of recommendations on post-pandemic safety and inclusion of diverse youth in IEC experiences. Below is a high-level summary of the recommendations generated by the IEC theme team:

1. The creation of a youth task force to create travel resources for safe and connected travel. The task force could advise and co-create country-specific cultural awareness training before departure, relatable social media content, and a safety planning toolkit.
2. The creation of one easily accessible website using plain language where youth can find information on matters such as youth rights abroad, the status of COVID-19, an embassy locator, and the status of vaccination in other countries.
3. Connecting with schools and using them for outreach on travel opportunities, specifically targeting remote communities.
4. Recognizing Indigenous passports and using Indigenous languages in travel (airports/online resources).
5. Developing racial bias training for employees in airports to reduce the number of racialized individuals who are so often needlessly singled out in this setting.

The 2021 #CanadaWeWant Conference

This year's #CanadaWeWant Youth Conference was a virtual gathering that took place March 1-8, 2021 (adapted for the social limitations of COVID-19). Over the week, 10 young people and adult allies from coast to coast to coast came together online to share their experiences, concerns, ideas and hopes for the #CanadaWeWant and need.

At the beginning of the conference, youth participants were invited to choose a theme team that interested them. They then worked in small groups through the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement's (CEYE) Young Decision Makers process. Some explored their topics quite broadly, discussing the issues and challenges that young people face and identifying possible solutions. Other teams were tasked with working directly on specific questions or on various creative products and deliverables that were brought to them by different organizations or government departments who were eager to hear directly from the youth. By the end of the week, all theme teams arrived at a set of recommendations that would help achieve the #CanadaWeWant. These recommendations were presented at the virtual National Showcase Event hosted by RBC's Future Launch Strategy to an audience of community stakeholders, policy makers and decision makers. All teams also created a theme team report, such as this one, to present their process and contextualize their recommendations.

The Process

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the #CanadaWeWant Youth Conference faced new limitations when coming together to collectively brainstorm how to create the #CanadaWeNeed. The IEC team faced some challenges as they all reside in different areas throughout the country and time differences meant some disconnect in scheduling activities around meal times and school. They created a safe space by spending intentional time getting to know one another, sharing stories and doing community building activities. Accepting all the ideas that each youth participant brought to the table was the foundation of the theme team and the reason they were able to work together to create a set of recommendations that tied in the thoughts and opinions of every participant.

Key Findings

Discussion

The goals of the IEC theme team were to first identify the major concerns that young people have regarding travelling in general but also within the current global context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once they identified the key areas of concern, they set about trying to come up with solutions that IEC can attempt to implement in order to make youth feel more included and safer abroad.

"The #CanadaWeWant values acceptable, inclusive, safe and youth centered travel opportunities."

- Youth Participant, 2021

Concerns about Travelling Post-COVID

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased Racism• Health Concerns• Safety Precautions• Social and Political Issues• Navigating countries' different COVID policies | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of Resources• Financial Barriers• Traveler's Guilt• Gender Inequality |
|--|---|

The Biggest Concerns Youth Have About Travelling Post-Pandemic

- The type of restrictions put in place in other countries
- The quality of healthcare in other countries
- Returning home or being stranded in another country if another global crisis occurs
- Being unaware if other travellers in the airport are being safe
- Risk of human trafficking while travelling in unfamiliar places

Guiding Lenses

The #CanadaWeWant Conference uses four guiding lenses to explore conference topics and to frame recommendations. These lenses were selected based on recurring themes that emerged during previous youth conferences and encourage young people to take an intersectional approach to understanding and tackling their topic area.

Rural and Remote Experience

"We want a country that connects with schools and partners for outreach regarding travel opportunities, specifically addressing remote, rural and northern communities and their unique needs."

– Youth Participant, 2021

It was discussed that youth living in rural and remote communities lack access to travel opportunities. In addition, these communities have a shortage of funding and infrastructure when it comes to technology and connectivity. As a result, the quality of resources in rural schools does not provide youth with equitable learning opportunities. In regard to travel, the main idea is to make it more accessible, suggesting that organizations should reach out to youth and present information about travelling abroad to schools and universities in rural communities.

Many students in rural communities expressed fear about travelling abroad to unfamiliar places because they have not yet had the opportunity to experience how it feels to be away from home. In addition, due to the financial and infrastructure inequities that these communities experience, youth in these places often have to put their money

towards other priorities. As a result, these youth do not have the funds to be able to travel abroad or even make their way to the appropriate places to complete their applications, such as a consulate. In order to make youth feel comfortable, it is important to have outreach programs in place that will provide resources and information that will ensure they are well-equipped for travel.

Considering the pre-existing barriers to travel in rural and remote communities, Power et al. (2020) describes further complications regarding travel for Indigenous populations as they are at higher systemic risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus due to factors such as poor healthcare quality and inadequate access to PPE. This merits further attention as there is considerable potential for traveler's guilt and racially problematic viewpoints stemming from certain groups having higher communicability rates.

Increased prices = Decreased participation

Youth participants also identified the need to reduce financial barriers common in rural and remote communities so that youth are not held back from these experiences.

- Making travel accessible for youth in rural and remote communities
- Providing transportation from community to airports (e.g., shuttles, buses, trains)
- Offering information for travel opportunities at school (e.g., posters and presentations)
- Supplying accessible resources for online education after travel
- Partnering with organizations that provide travel opportunities (e.g., Education First)

Addressing Structural Racism

Youth participants spent a significant amount of time discussing this lens. They discussed their own lived experiences of being racialized and having to travel, along with facts and discoveries made during their studies. Unfortunately, the lived experiences shared by racialized youth during the conference were negative. Youth participants described very challenging experiences when travelling abroad.

It was identified by youth participants that airport security and other staff need to participate in racial bias training in an effort to eliminate racism and to increase inclusiveness for racialized youth travelers. This training could increase awareness and respect of diversity within the airport and its travelers through resources and courses so there are no targeted incidents within international airports.

Discussions on racialized families brought to light the fact that they tend to struggle inter-generationally, and are often from low socioeconomic backgrounds due to systemic racism. As a result, the possibility to travel for racialized families may be limited because it is too expensive. This can be compared to families and youth who are not racialized and may have the budget to travel internationally due to their family income and history of past travel experiences. Children and youth of colour often do not have the same opportunities as their white counterparts and therefore may miss out on valuable experiences in the end because of this issue.

Another barrier for racialized children and youth that was discussed by the group revolves around facial recognition technology used internationally for travelling. People of colour are not as easily recognized by the technology as someone with lighter skin would be. This singles out people of colour when travelling, which may limit and decrease their desire and willingness to travel for fear of standing out among others. This also creates a barrier for racialized youth travelers because in many airports, this technology is required for border and airport security.

Youth participants suggested creating more travel opportunities that can be offered to racialized youth. This suggestion was made after youth participants identified that not many travel opportunities are offered to racialized

youth. For example, there is far more promotion of international exchange or volunteer programs directed toward non-racialized youth to travel through organizations. Whereas existing opportunities for youth travel through organizations often come with expensive fees, creating intentional subsidized travel programs for racialized youth could eliminate barriers.

It was also heavily emphasized by youth participants that BIPOC youth should be involved in the decision-making and building of a more inclusive travel experience. Excluding them from these planning conversations could be viewed as negating the efforts to encourage them to take advantage of IEC experiences.

Truth Leading to Reconciliation

“Recognizing the unique experiences and desires of Indigenous youth in all spaces is a crucial step towards reconciliation.”

– Youth Participant, 2021

Youth participants discussed Indigenous passports, highlighting how they are not being properly recognized by the Canadian government. This, in turn, introduced a significant barrier to travel among Indigenous youth, which further solidifies youth inequity and runs counter to efforts towards reconciliation. On top of this, it was also discussed in this conference that travel can be used as a tool to understand common histories of colonialism among Indigenous communities around the world. Indigenous languages rarely being spoken in travel services in Canada was also brought up, and youth participants indicated that this can further silence Indigenous voices.

The group recommended introducing Indigenous language services at airports and customs, as well as hiring Indigenous-language speaking staff to guide travelers. A second recommendation involved legally recognizing Indigenous passports. This will recognize Indigenous sovereignty and celebrate their diverse cultures, histories, and contributions. They also suggested improved resources and protection for Indigenous individuals when travelling.

Children’s Rights

Youth participants talked about the difficulty in accessing information regarding cultures, political climates, social norms, LGBTQ2S+, vaccination levels, child abduction, and safety in different countries. It was suggested that this significant information be presented via an app/website featuring helpful items such as maps of airports, cheap flight selectors, connections to other youth on flights, guidance on gate-transfer chaperones, and directions towards transportation to their hotel. This information should be displayed in a selection of different languages allowing international youth to experience travel in a more informed and comprehensive way.

Some organizations have developed techniques to create safer and better travelling experiences for youth and their families. These organizations have partnered with tourism and security companies to advance the safety of a region or area of a country. They utilize online databases, including a website that presents verified safe tour guides to select from and qualified individuals that can offer helpful services and inform youth where embassies are located. This allows easier access to knowledge surrounding human and children’s rights abroad as these organizations provide guidance regarding how laws are structured, who to contact when in need of services or information, and which regions of a country are the safest for enjoyable travel experiences. The model that these organizations employ of providing credible information and planning services could aid youth in travel in the post-pandemic context where planning to navigate post-pandemic public health and travel policies as well as health and safety concerns will be increasingly salient.

Dream Tree

The Dream Tree is a tool that is used to synthesize young people's ideas into a youth-friendly logic model on a given topic. When building a Dream Tree, the roots represent the foundation; the inputs, resources and values that are needed to work towards a goal. The trunk of the tree represents the activities that are needed, while the leaves are the outputs and indicators; highlighting what we will see as a result of the activities. The fruit represents the desired outcomes (the dream!). The visual below represents the Dream Tree that the theme team worked on.

#CANADA WE WANT

Fruit: the change we want to see (our dream)

Safe and equitable access to travel and travel resources for youth and adolescents from marginalized or disadvantaged populations, and rural and remote communities.

Leaves: outputs & indicators (how we know it's working)

Youth who lack financial resources will be able to travel more easily.

Language and sensory considerate resources for children and youth that provide COVID-19 numbers, alerts, and vaccination rates in other countries.

Airline travel that prioritizes cultural and personal safety.

Shuttling and transportation for rural and remote communities.

Culturally sensitive resources that provide info on dangers and specific inner workings of other countries.

Emergency resources for children & youth should they be in precarious or unsafe situations.

Trunk: activities (what we need to do)

Integrate Indigenous experiences and culture into travelling opportunities.

Dismantle systemic barriers that are limiting access to travel for youth who reside in rural and remote communities.

Consult and hire racialized and Indigenous airport employees for representative equity.

Create travel resources that provide real-time information on different safety factors of other countries and resources that help Canadian travelers in emergencies.

Empower children, youth, and adolescents through youth-led resources and outreach programs.

Leaves: outputs & indicators (how we know it's working)

Informative social media resources about travelling safely that explain how common knowledge is occasionally different in other countries.

Travelling opportunities being made available to racialized or systematically disadvantaged populations.

Youth-directed travelling opportunities for students being arranged between schools and travel agencies thereby promoting safety, access and opportunity.

People using air travel, promoting recovery of the industry.

Policy changes validating Indigenous passports and medical interventions.

Roots: inputs (resources) and values

Travel safety of Canadians abroad

Travel accessibility for rural, remote and marginalized communities

Equitable treatment while travelling and upon return

Accessibility to travel guides and resources

Vision for Change – Theme Team Recommendations

The team’s vision for change involves equality and safety for children and youth when they travel. Travel opportunities for rural, remote, and disadvantaged communities should be easily accessible and be equal across all citizens. The team also envisioned a need for easily accessible resources for Canadian youth when they travel abroad. These resources may include: an overview of the desired destination, an introductory crash course on the destination language to make sure the traveller doesn't stick out, and a background of the destination's culture to promote safety when travelling. All resources can help ensure the safety and comfort of the young traveller and effectively reduce problems involving racism. The recommendations for change consider the need for all governments to implement these visions we have listed and create a safe space in our airports and borders all across the world. This would create a safe and comforting experience for children and youth when travelling and also provide equality for all travellers. While the team recognizes that some of these recommendations fall outside of IEC’s mandate and control, we call on IEC to be allies in advocating for these changes and, where possible, to implement them themselves.

Visions for Change	Recommendations for Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal access to travel opportunities for rural and remote youth, BIPOC youth and women. • Equal access to travel and safety resources for Canadian youth and adolescents travelling abroad. • Access to knowledge regarding COVID, human trafficking and other risks, and how to avoid them. • Easily understandable resources, in one place that explain the political climate, COVID status, rights of travelers, cultural customs and risk factors of countries. • Social media resources to improve safety and knowledge while travelling, ways for youth to connect with peers when abroad in a safe way. • Youth-directed policy influence recognizing things like Indigenous passports, lack of access to travel for racialized youth due to systemic factors, and fear of solo travel for women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation of a youth task force to create travel resources for safe and connected travel. The task force could advise and co-create country-specific cultural awareness training before departure, relatable social media content, and a safety planning toolkit. • The creation of one easily accessible website using plain language where youth can find information on matters such as youth rights abroad, the status of COVID-19, an embassy locator, and the status of vaccination in other countries. • Connecting with schools and using them for outreach on travel opportunities, specifically targeting remote communities. • Recognizing Indigenous passports and using Indigenous languages in travel (airports/online resources). • Developing racial bias training for employees in airports to reduce the number of racialized individuals who are so often needlessly singled out in this setting.

References

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