



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
ALBERTA CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE
RURAL COMMUNITIES

Policy Brief

THE YOUTH PORTAL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Youth Portal	1
Operationalization of the Portal	2
Policy Recommendations: Portal Use.....	3
Conclusion	4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth engagement and retention in rural areas is notoriously low. This has profound impacts on rural communities, effectively, youth become non-engaged citizens who leave the community shortly after high school graduation. In an effort to address this issue, the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) worked with Tofield Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), Viking/Beaver FCSS, Alberta Health Services, and Beaver County on a two-year project to study youth engagement, the purpose of which was to provide data to inform a youth engagement, attraction and retention strategy for the Beaver County community

In April of 2017, the Beaver County Youth Engagement Project concluded. A key deliverable of the project was the Youth Portal. This portal contains within it all reports, strategies, data, the strategy road map, relevant academic literature, relevant grey literature, and asset maps that were used or created over the course of the project. The portal is best construed as a centralized tool which may be used by public administrators, relevant stakeholders, and interested members of the public.

The portal has a wide variety of uses including:

- Finding relevant academic literature on youth engagement.
- Identifying strategies to increase youth engagement.
- Employing asset maps and reports.
- Using any of the outputs for grants or bursaries.
- Identifying strategic development of organizational goals as related to youth engagement.
- Facilitate collaboration between different youth focused organizations.
- Facilitate development of youth policy.
- Further grow the portal to expand knowledge and strategies related to rural youth engagement.

The Beaver County Youth Engagement Project's deliverables can be used by a wide range of stakeholders to enhance youth engagement in rural communities. The portal provides an efficient way to extract the data, reports, strategies, and maps that were developed throughout the project.

Youth Portal

Portal material includes:

- Academic literature
- Grey literature
- The Strategy Roadmap and researched material
- Asset maps
- Reports
- Survey data
- Strategies

The portal's infrastructure is designed to allow a cross-variable search, meaning, users can select from a variety of fields to specify the type of material for which they are searching. For example, a user can specify their search function to strategies related to specific areas.

Further, the portal was designed to be a dynamic, rather than static, entity. More material can easily be added to the portal and this can extend well beyond information related only to youth engagement.

Operationalization of the Portal

There are four primary uses of the portal:

- General research
- Inform grant and bursary applications
- Guide best practices
- Provide an expandable infrastructure

Increasing youth engagement is a complex topic with multiple contributing factors. Individuals or organizations interested in expanding their knowledge of this topic and specifically on attaining data related to Beaver County, will find the portal of great use.

The portal provides extensive data related to youth engagement and tangentially related areas. Consequently, the data and reports can be used as reference material by interested parties who are applying for various grants and bursaries.

Numerous strategies and recommendations have been developed for the portal. These strategies can be used to guide best practices in efforts to increase youth engagement.

The volume of material in the portal can easily be expanded. Youth engagement is not an isolatable variable, the community's social and economic factors are directly related to youth engagement. For example, if there are no volunteer opportunities readily available or advertised, then the youth, unless they take initiative to develop or seek out volunteer positions, will not engage in volunteerism. Therefore, expanding into other areas more tangential to youth engagement can have the impact of increasing or assisting the increase of youth engagement.

Policy Recommendations: Portal Use

There exist four overarching policy recommendations related to portal use:

- That representatives of relevant or interested organizations have assigned user ID's to add resources to the portal.
- That the public access to the portal be marketed.
- That the portal be expanded beyond youth engagement.
- That the portal and its potentiality be operationalized.

It is vital that representatives of key stakeholders be included in the portal and have the capacity to use the portal and add to it, should they see fit. Administration of this task is ongoing and as new stakeholders emerge, they will need to be provided a user ID and a summary of how to use the portal.

Strategies, reports, maps, and certain data have been made accessible to the public. This can help foster agency and increase engagement. The public must be made aware of this resource through some form of advertising, be it on websites, social media, or newsletters.

Note, it may be beneficial to set up a direct link to a website which informs how to use the portal. This will greatly reduce complications as interested members join the portal.

Initially, the portal focused on youth engagement. However, isolating the portal to only youth engagement or even limiting it to the material that was initially uploaded to the portal, would be wasteful. The portal was designed to be expanded upon. As relevant stakeholders collect new data, develop reports, and perhaps engage in further research, all such material can be added to the portal. Further, the portal can be expanded beyond youth engagement, which itself is not an isolated issue but is impacted by many broader social and economic factors.

The portal is of little use unless stakeholders employ the data and strategies. In particular, strategies can be used in both the short term and long term within a developmental plan to ensure the most meaningful impact is attained.

Conclusion

The Youth Portal that the Beaver County Youth Engagement Project produced is a comprehensive tool. For public administrators, researchers, organizational representatives, or general members of the public, the portal can provide the research, data, maps, and strategies to spur youth engagement in rural areas. With that stated, youth engagement is connected to the wider community: the portal can act as a foundational tool expanding to include resource sections on broader social and economic community development. The intent of the portal's design was that it have the capacity to expand to encompass community development areas beyond youth engagement.

Youth engagement is but one component of a healthy and strong community, developing further data, research, and strategies in other social and economic arenas, in addition to the material currently presented in the portal, will enable a far greater capacity for rural community development.



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About the ACSRC

The ACSRC fills the gap for research and policy in rural areas by fostering constructive dialogue, promoting interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and developing partnerships between the University of Alberta and rural communities.

Mission

The mission of the ACSRC is to link the research, outreach and educational capacity of the University of Alberta with students, researchers, rural communities, rural community organizations and policy makers at multiple levels across the province, nationally, and internationally in order to support the improved sustainability of rural communities and populations.

General Information

The vision of the ACSRC is of resilient rural communities across Canada linked closely to the discovery, dissemination, and application of new knowledge at the University of Alberta through teaching and learning, research and creative activity, community involvement, and partnerships. Such resilient rural communities will hinge on informed citizens actively participating in community governance and development in order to support and sustain the people, livelihoods, regional and local capital, economic development and long-term social viability of rural communities as a key element of the Canadian economy, the natural environment and as home to many Canadians.

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