

CASE STUDY | SUDBURY YOUTH CO-DESIGN DIGITAL STRATEGY TO IMPROVE SERVICE ACCESS

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INTRODUCTION

Sudbury's newly launched Brand Innovation and Digital Strategy is an innovation project co-designed with youth and funded through the Communities Building Youth Futures Initiative (CBYF). The project's aim is to address barriers that youth experience in accessing local services, which was identified as a priority from a series of conversations with area youth.

The Districts of Sudbury Manitoulin spans across a large geographical area with youth residing in both rural and urban areas that have less access to immediate supports and services. The districts have a high population of bilingual, Franco-Ontarian youth, and youth who identify as Indigenous living on and off First Nation reserves. This diversity within the area's youth population adds to the complexity of addressing the challenge of simplifying how youth access needed supports and services. These challenges were confronted through a multi-sector, collective impact approach, that actively engaged youth leadership in co-developing a brand as well as a digital marketing strategy in partnership with youth-serving agencies. As a result of the research conducted and the needs that youth identified; an interactive community map was also created as an online navigation tool for youth to access available resources, services, and activities in the community.

Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF)

A 5-year national initiative dedicated to addressing educational and employment barriers for youth aged 15-30

Backbone staff:

Two full time staff (youth) dedicated to moving the collective impact initiative forward.

Marketing and Branding Project Team:

The action team tasked with providing expertise and consultation on the branding project; includes youth with lived experience.

Leadership Table:

Acts as a board of directors for the CBYF initiative and provides strategic guidance and advice.

“Let's treat youth services the way we treat College and University. We need to be talking from a young age about what is out there for youth.”

— Youth Participant

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Brand Identity and Digital Strategy project’s goal was to develop an in-depth understanding of youth and how to best engage, recruit and maintain youth participation. Additionally, the project served to create a virtual platform to enable youth to connect and more easily navigate services within their community with a unique brand, championed by youth.

To inform this project, input was gathered from: backbone staff, frontline workers, educators, youth, parents, the Marketing and Branding Project Team and the Leadership Table. The project team relied on research to obtain information about current youth trends; advice for engaging youth; and best practices and tools to effectively use social media to reach youth.

Youth were involved at every stage of the project, from development through to evaluation. The Project Team demonstrated an ability to pivot and adapt to the expectations, availabilities, perspectives, and challenges offered by the 103 youth who engaged in the project’s co-design, which allowed for the youth voice to remain central throughout the life of the project. For example, the initial project proposal described youth developing the logo and overall brand; however, this plan evolved to enable youth to actively contribute to the logo and brand development process by providing them with professional support from design and marketing professionals. As a result of this shift, the project became a more inclusive process and resulted in a product that has a look and feel that is inviting and relatable to youth of all backgrounds.



PROJECT INSIGHTS & LEARNINGS

Defining the Project’s Target Population

One of the first questions discussed with the marketing firm was the target population. Answering this question is a critical first step to ensure that your service, product, or brand is tailored to the characteristics of those you want to reach. It was a very difficult question for our project team to answer. Discussions ensued at length over the creation of a “user profile” and highlighted how much diversity exists among youth. Ultimately, the Project Team was not able to clearly define a typical user.



The competing needs of youth-serving organizations at the Leadership Table added another layer of complexity to the task of determining the project's target population. Many organizations at the Leadership Table serve a distinct sub-population of youth. Taking in the needs, desires, interests, and preferences of these diverse sub-populations of youth heightened the risk that, in trying to serve all, the end-product would not serve any group well. The Project Team's challenge was to create a final product that would be relatable to all.

Obtaining Statistical Information

Collecting statistical information about area youth was an important aspect of the Brand Identity and Digital Strategy Project. This data was needed for reporting purposes and evaluation and to identify and quantify the youth in the district who experience the highest number of barriers. The process of collecting this data gave the backbone staff a better appreciation of how such information can be potentially triggering for youth. A positive outcome of this work is that the Project Team discovered safer, more supportive ways of collecting information.

Input from the project's Youth Expert Panel was an invaluable resource. One example of this related to the initial survey question: "Are you a visible minority?" One youth expert panel member challenged that question and asked, "Who are you to decide that I am a minority? Am I less than? The minority of what?" This led to the survey question being changed to: "How would you describe your ethnic identity?"

The learnings derived from this simple example illustrated to the Project Team how even small actions can affect the ability to create a safe space.

Valuable Insights About the Needs of Youth

The research conducted for the Brand Identity and Digital Strategy revealed important details about navigation; service use; the interpersonal needs of youth for connection and community; and, how to co-create community spaces with youth that reflect their needs, desires, and interests. These insights have now been integrated in every aspect of the work and have also been a catalyst for spinoff projects such as the youth-led [technology hub project](#) and the creation of a [youth engagement strategy toolkit](#) for use by youth-serving agencies.

Advice for Using Different Research Methodologies

This project used a variety of methods to gather information about what youth need and want to help overcome barriers to accessing service and supports; these are detailed below:

- **Youth Focus Groups** – Providing questions to participants prior to the session enabled youth to prepare for and have greater confidence during the session. This led to:
 - More in-depth and meaningful conversation
 - Higher engagement with youth who experience anxiety or need time to process information
 - The creation of a safe space for youth living with autism or other exceptionalities.

“You are more likely to have people respond if you allow them a chance to respond the way they want to.”
— Youth Participant

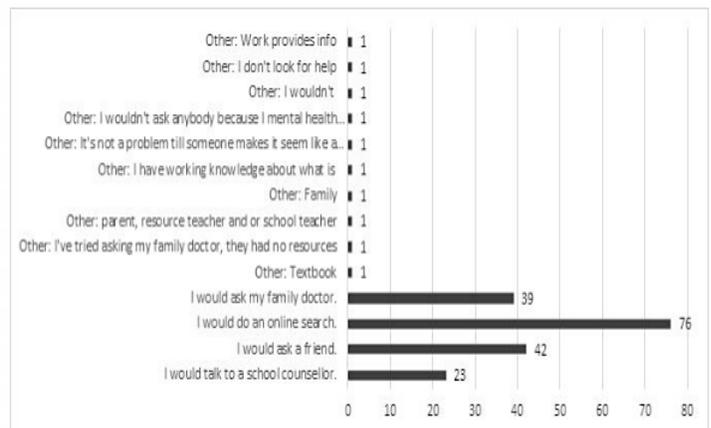
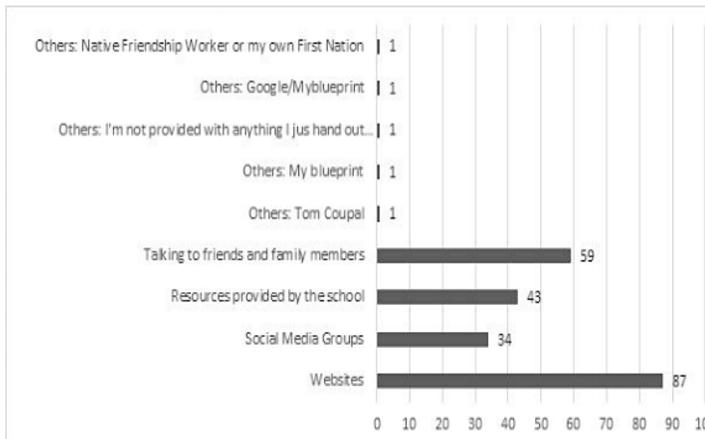
- **Virtual Focus Groups** – The virtual space made participation more accessible, eliminated travel as a barrier for rural youth and those experiencing precarious employment by accommodating their working hours and providing shorter focus group sessions which required less time commitment. The chat box within the virtual room provided a safe space for youth to contribute their insights.
- **Peer-to-Peer Interviews** – This methodology created a youth-led space that encouraged open communication and honesty

Marketing to Youth

Research findings suggest that youth find most of their information about universities, careers, job opportunities, health and wellness, mental health, and addictions online. In fact, our project youth survey found that 76% said that they would do an online search for information about mental health or addiction issues whereas only 23% of the youth surveyed said that they would go to a school guidance counsellor.

How do you currently access information about universities, careers, job opportunities, etc.? Please check all that apply:

If you were interested in finding help with mental health issues or addictions, where would you look? Please check all that apply:

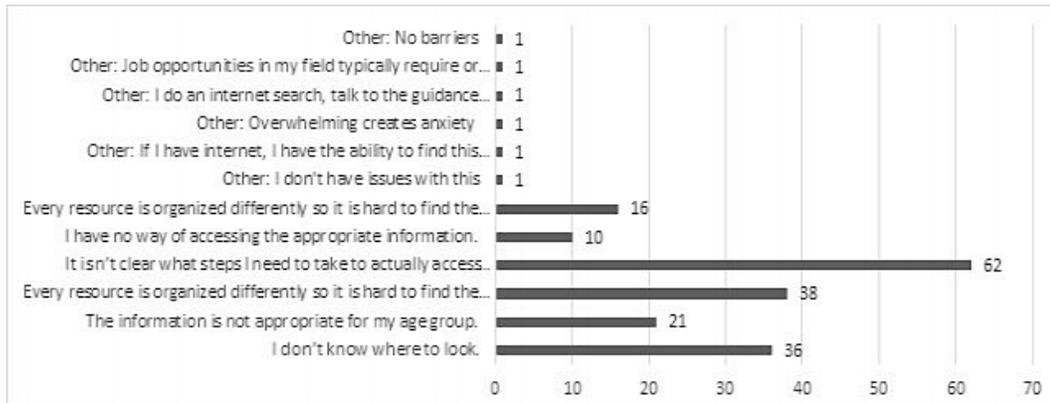


Barriers to Accessing Information and Service

Learnings from the survey helped to identify some of the barriers that youth currently face when accessing information in their community. Survey findings revealed:

- 61.4% of youth surveyed stated that the most significant barrier they face when accessing information is that “it is not clear what steps I need to take to access service.”
- 53% of youth indicated that “every resource is organized differently so it is hard to find the right information.”
- A small number of respondents stated that they did not have access to online information. It is worth noting however that, since the survey was only distributed electronically, this data is skewed.

When you need to find information on education, job opportunities, or health and wellness support, what are the main barriers you face? Please check all that apply:



Youth Preferences in Social Media

The project’s youth survey also highlighted important information regarding youth preferences related to social media platforms. In fact, youth’s preferred social media platform for entertainment and connecting with friends can be different that their preferred platforms for accessing research and information. Specifically:

- **Instagram** is the preferred method across all social media. It is used for research and for following organizations.
- **Facebook** is used by older youth as a place to get information and engage in conversations.
- **Tik Tok/Reddit/Snapchat** are preferred platforms for social connection and to see “funny” ads.
- **YouTube** is used for entertainment and only to watch short videos (30 seconds)
- **Twitter** was occasionally used by a few older participants.

Facebook – older participants use this as a place to get information. A few noted they are more free to share/post here because they do not follow friends and family like on other platforms. This is a medium to engage in conversation.

Instagram is the preferred method across all social media. Participants use this for research, are open to advertisements and follow organizations here.

Tik Tok/Reddit/SnapChat are used purely for social reasons or to see ‘funny’ ads.

Youtube – for entertainment and watching videos. Only watch short videos, and they will stop watching after about :30 secs.

Twitter – a few older participants noted they use this, but not as much.

Creating – and Testing – a Brand

Youth provided important advice and feedback throughout the brand development process. One memorable youth comment noted that one of the suggested names “sounds like a service” and that she could imagine peers rolling their eyes if she referred them to that organization. Conversely, another proposed name sounded like “something for them to be a part of” and stirred both excitement and intrigue. This feedback emphasizes the importance of engaging youth regularly as the project evolves.

Brand Related Feedback

- Keep the name simple
- Do not include the word “youth” in the name, but it could be used in a tag line before the logo
- Do not use acronyms for the name
- The name does not need to encompass every service we offer but does need to be something that people feel proud to repeat and direct peers to
- Not too corporate-like

Selecting a Logo | A Shift in Culture

The design team initially developed 3 different names, each with two design variations. Three different sessions were hosted to get feedback on the options and narrow the choices. Ultimately two of the logos were refined and presented for final approval. The team was about to select the Space4U logo, but before finalizing their decision, asked the designers which option youth preferred. They were informed that while youth had interest in both logos, there was a preference for the Future North logo. Based on this information the table decided that youth participants should be invited to vote to select the preferred logo.

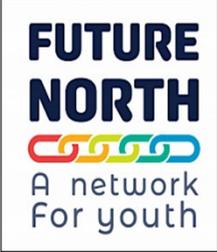
Recommendation(s)











This decision reflected an important shift in the Leadership Table’s culture. While the process to generate the logos and brand included extensive youth engagement and input, the Leadership Table had the authority to make the final decision. However, the Leadership Table opted to defer the final decision in favour of the preference of youth participants. It seemed fitting that branding created *for youth* would be decided on *by youth*.

The Final Choice



Community Map | A Virtual Service Access Platform

A key objective of this project, along with the creation of a logo, brand identity and marketing strategies, was to develop a virtual platform to make it easier for youth to discover and more easily navigate community services and supports. The project's research and discovery phases confirmed that there were considerable service navigation challenges experienced within the community. Youth did not know where to access services, how to access them, or even the extent to which services were available to them. To address this, it was determined that the first step would be the creation of an online navigation tool.

The project also considered using existing community information platforms as well as reviewing similar platforms to find promising examples of interactive navigation tools. The web developer offered concerns about the practicality of incorporating a service navigation tool into a time-limited initiative. The development of an online navigation tool required the use of a spreadsheet to categorize and structure all the service information.

The web developer indicated that the maintenance of the spreadsheet can become quite arduous and when not managed correctly, it can become a pain point for service users. To address this, the Project Team decided that:

- A section would be added beside the community map to allow users to report errors or missing resources and services.
- Categories would be added gradually in response to pain points or challenges.
- Filter questions were limited to category headings only, to limit flaws with the operating system that would create potential user pain points e.g., keyword search bar.
- Youth specified that they were looking for resources and activities beyond just “community services” and that an interactive map would be beneficial if it also included “things to do” and “places to go”.

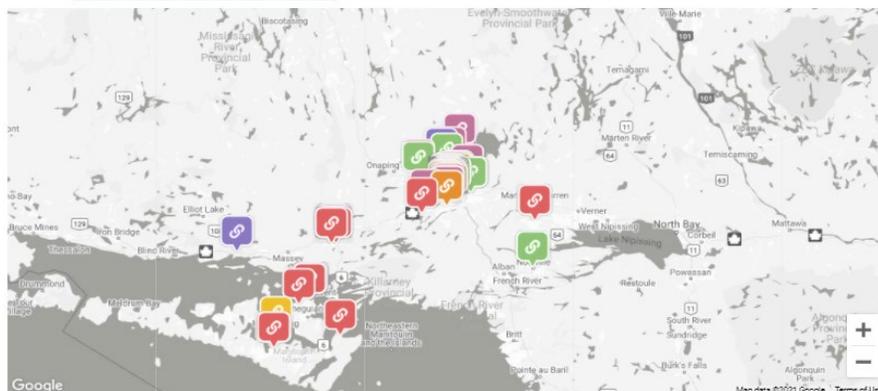
“International students get here, and they don't know what to do or where to go, other than drinking.”
— Youth Participant

COMMUNITY MAP

Future North's interactive community map is designed to create a central location for youth services, resources and activities within the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin.

Please note some services, hours of operation and service features may be temporarily affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Filter by



PROJECT INSIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

Creating a simple, responsive, and accurate information platform that requires information from a multitude of organizations that span a vast geography and providing it in two languages is a complex undertaking. Some of the insights and challenges involved are highlighted below.

Timelines

The initial timelines for the project had to be reassessed and amended five times. The reasons for these delays included:

- The length of time to develop the website, more specifically the community map navigation tool, in both official languages.
- The creation of the spreadsheet was lengthy and not much development could take place without its completion.
- Many of the organization descriptions were not translated or required review by a professional translator.
- Incorporating youth engagement and feedback extended the project design timeline.
- Covid-19 restrictions continued to be extended, and the team was choosing to delay the official launch until it could be held in person in September 2021.

Identifying and Mapping Referral Pathways

- Agency referral pathways for agencies were not always clear and could not be easily accessed. Many organizations cannot receive a direct referral from a person and cannot be accepted from any medium other than by fax machine.
- Many services are only available through referrals from crisis services, resulting in fewer early intervention opportunities for youth who are struggling with mental health or addiction.
- Mapping and linking the referral pathways on the website was not something that was easily achievable. In fact, it will require lengthy reviews of the system, access points and service redesign, to make referral pathways clear and accessible.
- Limited public information is available regarding referral pathways.
- It was not always clear what services, programs or opportunities were provided by organizations. In developing the resource book, reviewers often had to dig for information or reach out to contacts for service descriptions on programs known within the community but not explained anywhere on social media, website etc.

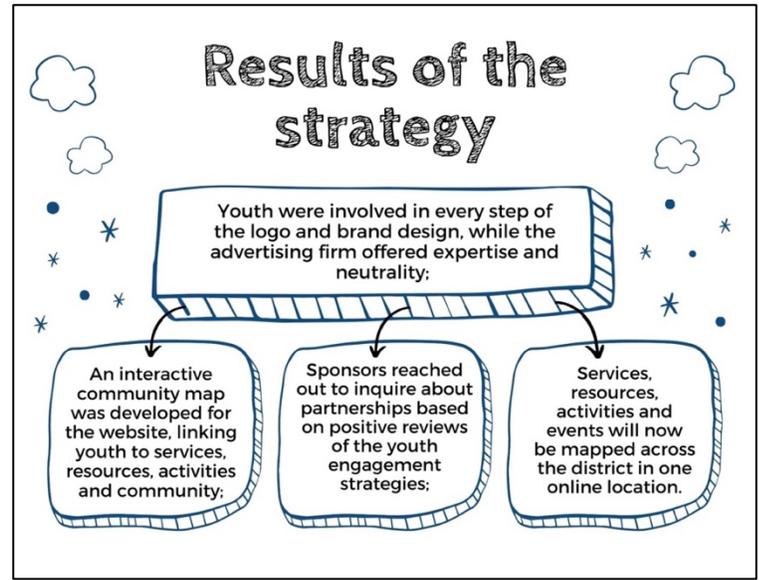
“ People need to realize. When you tell your story, you are re-living your trauma... Each time you fill out a package and forms, you have to go through it all again.”

— Youth Participant

PROJECT IMPACT

The impact of this project extended well beyond the creation of brand identity and website/ marketing strategy. The creative engagement of youth through the research phase of the project, generated positive unintended outcomes including:

- Through word of mouth about the Future North Technology Hubs, another organization contributed \$13,000 to the project, which doubled its overall supply budget.
- The Technology Hub project linked with an existing Virtual Services Hub project which was underway through a network partner. This led to a decision to align the two projects, leverage their collective research, and expand their collective reach.
- Two youth led the design, research, and development of the Technology Hubs.
- The backbone staff created a youth directory of more than 62 youth who became interested in participating in future activities.
- The effective youth engagement strategies for this project were developed into a youth engagement toolkit.
- Two key partnerships developed because of this project; one of which has secured funding of over \$18,000 to implement a new youth-led pilot project in the community.
- Insights, tips, tricks, and technological aspects of the community map development were tracked and will be shared with community partners interested in scaling the community map concept elsewhere.
- A total of five youth were engaged in co-operative education placements through their college or high school.



CONCLUSION

In the span of six short months, The Brand Identity and Digital Strategy project achieved many important results and engaged over a hundred youth throughout its development. Over the coming weeks, months and years, Future North intends to continue to enhance the Community Map by working with network agencies to install a self-referral button for eligible services, directly through the Community Map links. With the guidance and support of the Communities Building Youth Futures Initiative, Future North will share their findings, tools, and engagement strategies beyond the community network, on a national level, in the hopes of encouraging more youth serving agencies to adopt similar engagement strategies and provide opportunities for youth-led projects that are supported with resources, mentorship and the use of professional tools. Through the process of co-design and partnership with youth, Future North has established a brand that youth say represents them and their aspirations. A brand that does not feel “corporate” or “like a service”. A brand that feels like a community. A network. A place to belong. A place to create and connect and build upon a future for the community. A network by youth for youth.



REFLECTIONS FROM PETRYNA ADVERTISING

Pamela Therrien, CEO: From our very first meeting with Nicole and the team, our team knew this was going to be a transformational project. We knew that we would learn more about the struggles youth in our community are facing, and how we can do better as a community to ensure successful transitions during those key stages in early adult life. We also knew that most of us were not a part of this target market anymore. This was a project where research and engagement would be critical, and we were lucky to have a client that understood the importance of this as well. We never sat back and said, “I like this better” or “I think we should do this”, we always asked our youth and let them lead our strategy. This was not always easy, but it was great to watch our clients stay true to this commitment at every stage of the process. This engagement and research meant adding more time into the Brand Development stage, which resulted in timelines being pushed back three weeks. The result is something that when we show youth they say, “I would use that” or “this is really good”. We have worked with many clients who target the same market, and these words do not come easily. This is a challenging target market to connect with from a marketing point of view, because as soon as you think you have unlocked the key to a successful strategy, you realize that you did not. By engaging with youth throughout the entire process, we stayed true to our vision and mission. It was an honour to work with a team of professionals who are so passionate about helping youth succeed, they trusted the process, and remained committed the entire time to ensuring youth voices remained the loudest. This was truly a project that was informed by youth at every stage, and I think this is a key reason why it will be successful.

The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag icon above the letter "a".The logo for Tamarack Institute, featuring a stylized yellow "E" icon to the left of the text "TAMARACK INSTITUTE" in a serif font.

Initial funding for the **Brand Innovation and Digital Strategy** was provided as a Community Innovation Fund grant to [Sudbury Communities Building Youth Futures](#). The aim of [Community Innovation Fund](#) grants is to pilot and scale innovative projects to support better outcomes for youth.

[Communities Building Youth Futures](#) (CBYF) is a five-year, pan-Canadian project to develop Collective Impact, system-wide solutions for youth as they build and act upon plans for their future. CBYF is funded by the [Government of Canada's Goal Getters Program](#) and delivered by the [Tamarack Institute](#).

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada