

AGAINST THE CURRENT KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE 2026

RAISE
OR RAZE



How do our
systems shape
youth futures?

The Students Commission
of Canada, engaging youth
for 35 years

Against the Current Knowledge Exchange Program

Toronto Reference Library
May 13, 2026



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



La commission
des élèves du
Canada
*Le centre d'excellence pour
l'engagement des jeunes*

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Registration & Welcome Breakfast 7:30AM to 8:30AM

Opening Remarks & Session 1 8:30AM to 10:30AM
Intergenerational Partnerships, The Heart of the Village

Session 2 10:45AM to 11:45AM
System Change, Avoiding the Drift



Lunch 12:00PM to 1:00PM

Session 3 1:00PM to 2:00PM
Hearing Unheard Moments, Shifting Cultures

Session 4 2:10PM to 3:10PM
Celebrating Culture, The Roots of the Village

Session 5 3:20PM to 4:20PM
Spaces that Shape the Village, Families, Schools, Schools, Recreation and Business

Closing Summary 4:30PM to 5:00PM

PROGRAM FLOW

**Against the Current invites participants to explore the question:
Raise or Raze - How do our systems shape youth futures?**

Are we co-creating environments that empower young people to thrive, while critically examining the barriers that still hold them back? This year, Against the Current will mark a milestone: the Students Commission of Canada's 35th anniversary as a youth voice node within Canada's youth-serving network.

Youth-serving collaboration is, in part, about co-creating environments that build youth confidence and competence through structured support. For the day, we create a village environment. Expert speakers kick off each session block for the whole village; then participants move into various neighborhoods to explore together the session theme in smaller groups through facilitated conversations and diverse styles of interactive techniques.

How will the day flow?

Session blocks begin with a *Kick Start Presentation* at the front of the room. Led by a team of youth leaders, adult allies from the non-profit sector, and academic partners from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, these presentations combine evidence, lived experience, and critical questions.

After a short transition, participants head into their chosen *Neighbourhood* breakouts, where they'll engage in a small group activity or conversation that build upon session themes. Neighbourhood breakouts are opportunities for all participants to shape the conversation and the current of the day. These sessions are co-led by youth and adult facilitators and offer different ways of engaging with the session's central question. Taken together, neighbourhoods comprise an *intergenerational village* of connection and action each of us can bring into communities and systems beyond Against the Current.

Each session block includes time to recharge between sessions—grab a coffee, keep a conversation going, or pause for reflection.

Neighbourhoods to Explore

Each Neighbourhood offers a distinct way to experience and explore youth leadership:



1. **Artistic Neighbourhood:** Uses creative methods (art, storytelling, performance) to examine key questions and build shared understanding.



2. **Kinesthetic Neighbourhood:** Uses physical movement and activity to explore complex or controversial leadership topics in an embodied way.



3. **Dive Deeper into Kick Start Neighbourhood:** Extends the kick start conversation with interactive discussions and activities led by the presenters.



4. **Village Exchange Neighbourhood:** Highlights facilitated critical conversations and resource sharing on topics related to the session theme.



5. **Program Design Neighbourhood:** Focuses on unpacking the building blocks of youth leadership, engagement programming, and system change, strategic approaches with hands-on tools and discussions.



6. **Studio Neighbourhood:** Offers participants a chance to help document the day—record interviews, create content, and contribute to collective knowledge mobilization.



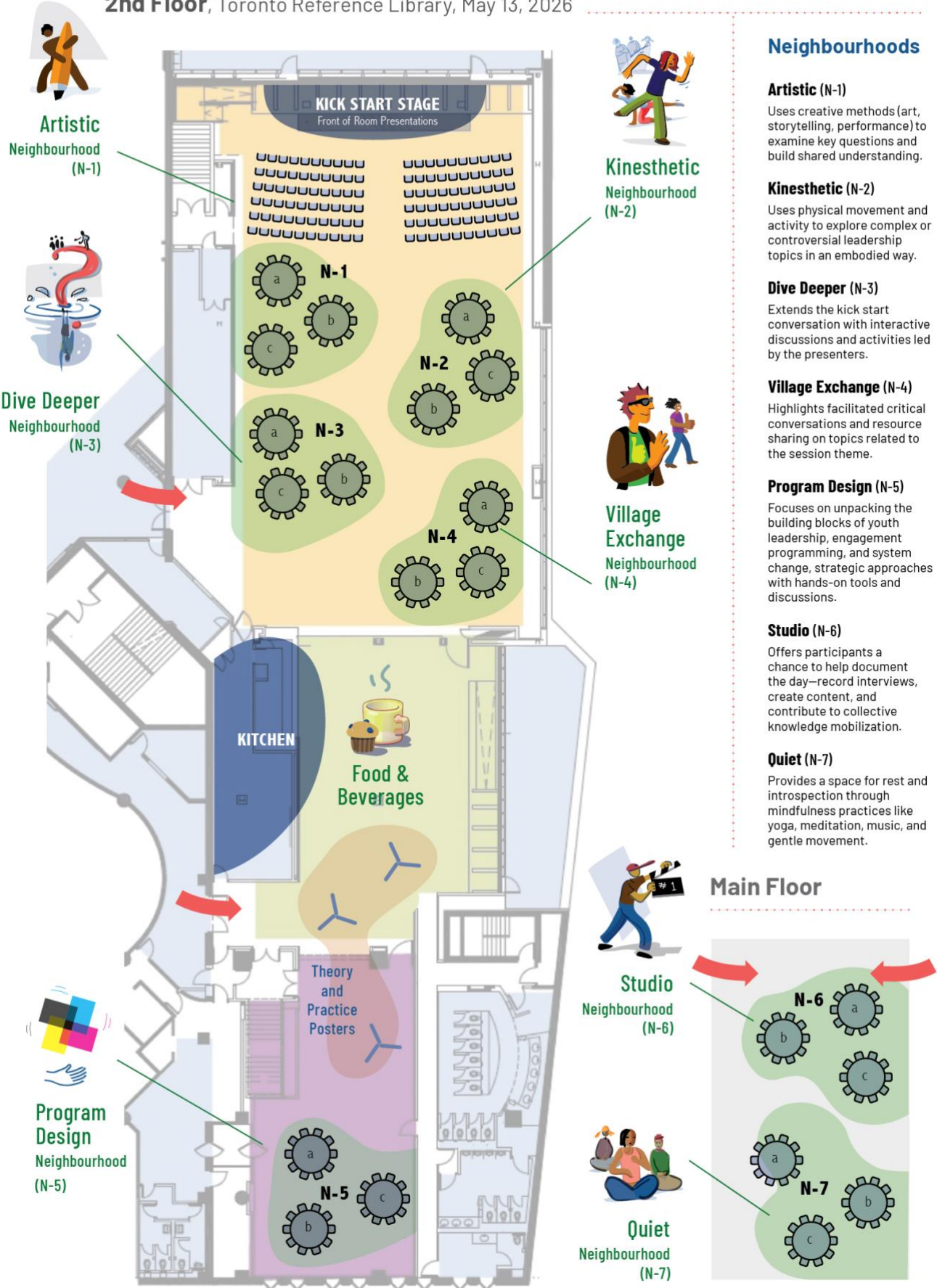
7. **Quiet Neighbourhood:** Provides a space for rest and introspection through mindfulness practices like yoga, meditation, music, and gentle movement.

In Theory & Practice Poster Zone, participants, academics, and community partners showcase models and research related to youth thriving and engagement. It's a great place to gather inspiration and take away tangible ideas.

INTERGENERATIONAL VILLAGE

Exploring evidence, environments and techniques

2nd Floor, Toronto Reference Library, May 13, 2026



Neighbourhoods

Artistic (N-1)

Uses creative methods (art, storytelling, performance) to examine key questions and build shared understanding.

Kinesthetic (N-2)

Uses physical movement and activity to explore complex or controversial leadership topics in an embodied way.

Dive Deeper (N-3)

Extends the kick start conversation with interactive discussions and activities led by the presenters.

Village Exchange (N-4)

Highlights facilitated critical conversations and resource sharing on topics related to the session theme.

Program Design (N-5)

Focuses on unpacking the building blocks of youth leadership, engagement programming, and system change, strategic approaches with hands-on tools and discussions.

Studio (N-6)

Offers participants a chance to help document the day—record interviews, create content, and contribute to collective knowledge mobilization.

Quiet (N-7)

Provides a space for rest and introspection through mindfulness practices like yoga, meditation, music, and gentle movement.

Main Floor

Studio
Neighbourhood
(N-6)

Quiet
Neighbourhood
(N-7)

SESSION DETAILS

Intergenerational Partnerships, The Heart of the Village

35 years of shifting the culture of youth engagement, coast-to-coast-to-coast and globally

Linda Rose-Krasnor, PhD. Professor Emeritus, Brock University, Founding Academic Director of the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

Sharif Mahdy, Chief Executive Officer, The Students Commission of Canada

Denise Campbell, Deputy City Manager, City of Toronto

David Forteau, Creative Director, Producer

Brina Ludwig-Prout, Board Chair, The Students Commission of Canada

Niko Lacroix, Influencer, Roster Cohort 2

Abbi Poirier, Influencer, Roster Cohort 2

System Change, Avoiding the Drift

Collaborative structures and partnerships needed for communities to move upstream, toward system changes that create environments where youth can thrive

Tanya Halsall, PhD, Scientist, University of Ottawa Institute of Mental Health Research at The Royal, Assistant Professor, School of Epidemiology and Public Health, University of Ottawa

Chad Bredin, Policy Analyst, Public Health Agency of Canada

Stephanie Wright, Manager of Youth Programs and Partnerships, Next Gen Men

Youth Leaders, from programs and research projects across Canada

Hearing Unheard Moments, Shifting Cultures

Difficult conversations and alignment of efforts needed to reach cultural tipping points, locally and nationally, towards safety and inclusion

Heather Lawford, PhD, Professor, Bishop's University, SSHRC TII Canada Research Chair, Youth Development, 3M National Teaching Fellow

Roger Romero, Manager of Youth Services, Kingston Community Health Centres

Lanny Libby-Jimenez, Senior Planner-Grants, Social Policy and Projects, City of Vancouver

Madin Hoey, Prince Albert Youth Group

Jiya Charla, Program Facilitator, Red Fox Healthy Living Society

Celebrating Culture: The Roots of the Village

How prioritizing the needs, dreams, and interests of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth reshapes what intergenerational partnerships in a healthy village look like for (non)Indigenous youth.

Jennifer Markides, PhD, SSHRC TII Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Youth Wellbeing and Education Associate Professor, Curriculum and Learning, Werklund School of Education & Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

Zoey Roy, PhD, Researcher, Spoken Word Artist, Community-based Educator

Youth Leaders, from programs and research projects across Canada

Spaces that Shape the Village: Families, Schools, Recreation, and Businesses

Exploring how core community environments can partner to support youth flourishing

Lori Brooks, Director-General, Employment Skills Development Canada

Tracy Luca-Hugar, Executive Director, Mentor Canada

Andrea Haefele & Maleah Omari, Ophea

Yana Berardini, PhD, Assistant Professor, Child and Youth Studies, Trent University and member of the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence

Steven Whitaker, OCT, MES, SWAN (Sports, Wellness and Achievement Network)

Youssef Khalil, Youth Leader

Wrap-up Raise or Raze & Closing Remarks

What today means for raising youth up for a brighter tomorrow and razing the systemic barriers in their way -- Reflections and Directions.

Heather Ramey, CYW, PhD, Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University

Sharif Mahdy, Chief Executive Officer, The Students Commission of Canada, in conversation with key speakers of the day