



RBC Future Launch Youth Forums 2017:

What We Learned

In this rapidly changing world, there's a new reality when it comes to work. A degree or diploma no longer guarantees a job, and some of the positions, skills and trades of today won't exist – or be relevant – in the future.

Through an unprecedented 10-year, \$500 million commitment, RBC Future Launch™ is focused on driving real change and preparing today's young people for the future world of work, helping them access the skills, job experience and networks that will enable their success.

At the beginning of this 10-year journey RBC® wanted to go beyond research and expert reports to better understand the regional issues facing youth across Canada and to hear directly from young people and organizations that work with them. From November 2016 to May 2017, the RBC Future Launch team held 15 youth forums across the country, bringing together over 430 partners, including young people, to uncover ideas and talk through solutions to address the workforce gaps Canada's youth face today.

RBC Future Launch Youth Forums 2017: Six Things We Learned



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Young people lack awareness and exposure.



Life and social gaps are unmistakable.



Mentoring can help – when done well.



It's all about experiential learning.



Financial literacy is a serious gap.



Regional differences are significant – and need to be addressed.

15 YOUTH FORUMS ACROSS 17 COMMUNITIES



Here are 6 things we learned:

1. Young people lack awareness and exposure



There is a distinct absence of awareness when it comes to programs, support, and community resources designed to help young people enter and thrive in the workforce. While these programs do exist, youth aren't aware of when and where they are taking place or how to access them; therefore they're missing the boat on valuable support.

What's more, career planning tools and labour market information aren't getting to young people early enough. In many forums, participants stated that the high school level is too late for youth to begin planning for their future – in particular when they face multiple barriers.

And while resources are available, they are simply not easy to digest or access. There is so much information online that it becomes overwhelming and young people give up looking for jobs. There is also too much reliance on students knowing what to ask and who to approach at career fairs and other job forums. Guidance is required, and a system of navigation is needed to connect youth with the programs and tools they need to succeed.

On a practical level, support services must be available when youth are available to access them – service hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday to Friday when young people are in school just don't help.

2. Life and social skill gaps are unmistakable



Many young people today are missing the basic skills they need to network, interview and succeed in a work environment. While they are technically adept, youth have distinct disconnects that need to be addressed if they are going to be set up for success. Here are some of the most common gaps identified:

- **Time management:** Schools are too lenient with deadlines, which translates to poor time management skills and a lack of accountability in the workforce
- **Networking:** Shaking hands, making eye contact, how to have a face-to-face conversation and develop professional relationships
- **Workplace etiquette:** There is a mismatch between the workplace expectations of young people entering the workplace and those who are later in career, which causes an intergenerational communication gap and friction over dress code, not using cell phones on the job or coming in late to work. Both sides need to adapt their communication style and workplace etiquette to be successful in the future

- **Writing skills:** In an increasingly digital and mobile world some young people are not developing the grammar, email etiquette and written communication skills appropriate for the workplace

Many of these skill gaps can be attributed to the digital separation that youth experience, which breeds anxiety and prevents them from developing an ability to accept constructive feedback and engage in professional conversations.

Many are comfortable in front of a computer screen, but in the workforce, strong interpersonal skills are needed to succeed. In many cases, youth aren't even aware that these gaps exist and find out too late that they are essential to thrive in the workplace. Employers also need to find ways of incorporating this into onboarding practices and early-in-career training for young people.

3. Mentoring can help – when done well



Connecting youth to individuals within the workforce can help them identify the transferrable skills they possess, and better understand how to market those skills to prospective employers.

This is where constructive mentorship can play a significant role, as mentors can help young people understand how to function in a corporate structure, learn workplace culture and visualize a path for the future.

And this applies to the whole spectrum of youth – from the affluent and engaged to those struggling with cultural, regional and personal barriers. On one hand, students emerging from post-secondary education have been familiar with a competitive school environment, and need to understand that they

are entering a team environment where collaboration is valued and required. On the other hand, those facing generational poverty and a cycle of unemployment may not have access to a role model for work, which means they don't have the skills, experience or support to approach an employer, solve problems or even ask for help.

But mentorship can only help if it's genuine and relevant. Youth must feel like their mentor is invested in them and understands their needs. That it's something they want to do, not something they have to do. Mentors within their communities, engaged retirees who can help with life skills and small business owners were identified as individuals who could make a meaningful difference on the ground level.

4. Expectation-setting is critical – and experiential learning can help



When it comes to work, there is a big mismatch between expectations and reality.

The perception of some employers is that youth are looking for the top job before earning the opportunity to get there, seeking instant gratification. Youth need to become comfortable with stepping stones and understand the routes through which one can achieve their goals and reach their desired job, role and career (and the compensation that goes along with it). Teaching young people that careers can be like a game of snakes and ladders – and not one big mountain – is essential; as is the recognition that the ups and downs are OK, as every part of the journey builds skills.

Across the board we heard that experiential learning before formal entry into the workforce is critical to level setting expectations and providing essential skills. High school co-ops, volunteer positions and apprenticeships will help develop practical skills and level set expectations on how one gets from point A to point B within an organization. This on-the-job experience can also help broaden exposure to what else is out there beyond the traditional jobs (doctor, lawyer, teacher, fire fighter), and teach youth the kind of effort required to succeed.

5. Financial literacy is a serious gap



Across Canada, young people are struggling with understanding the basics of managing their money, such as opening a bank account, managing student loans, doing taxes, avoiding payday loans and monthly budgeting. Basic concepts like debit, credit and common banking terminology continue to cause stress

from high school and into adulthood. While parents are primed to take a significant role in teaching their children about finances, financial literacy programs – set up in schools and communities – are needed to formally educate youth on these critical fundamentals and help them make smart financial decisions.

6. Regional differences are significant – and need to be addressed



While widespread national changes are needed to provide young people with opportunities and experience, regional sensitivity is required to make these changes work within individual communities. As we travelled across the country, unique challenges were identified in each community we visited:

- **In rural communities**, cities with large boundaries, such as Sudbury, and areas with limited public transit, transportation is a significant barrier that can prevent youth from accessing work and training opportunities
- **In communities such as Edmonton and Kamloops**, where many jobs are just outside city limits and require operating a vehicle, not having a driver's license can be a significant obstacle to employment
- Using digital tools and technology to deliver education and training resources was consistently identified as a solution for young people across the country. However, in many rural and remote communities, availability of the internet or appropriate technology is a challenge, which further isolates young people and their ability to build skills and navigate their career path
- In the **Atlantic region and the Territories**, retaining young people and educating them on the options available in their community is a key issue; better integration of newcomers is a priority in Atlantic Canada, Montreal and Saskatoon
- **In Alberta**, the impact of the decline in oil and gas industry has resulted in a generation of young people with limited education and a lack of job opportunities. Programs focused on retraining, education, and reintegration into the workforce need to be prioritized
- **In Manitoba**, Indigenous youth who have had to relocate to Winnipeg to attend post-secondary or find work have limited support and face barriers such as finding affordable housing and accessing the culturally relevant networks that can set them up for success
- **In New Brunswick**, there is a big divide between English and French and the opportunities that exist for non-bilingual youth. We also heard about high teen pregnancy rates in Saint John and Moncton, and the systemic barriers this creates for entry into employment

Learning about and understanding these regional differences will be critical to the success of RBC Future Launch and the information gained through the Youth Forums will be invaluable.



Where we go from here

Following the youth forums, it's clear that the conversation isn't over. In order to provide relevant, current and meaningful support to Canada's young people, ongoing dialogue is necessary. The forums produced a number of suggestions that will be considered and discussed to maintain the momentum, including:

- Hosting a series of youth-only forums
- Establishing an advisory council of youth, organizations and ambassadors to validate initiatives and share solutions
- Produce HR best practices and onboarding tips for start-ups and small businesses that have limited HR resources
- Engage retirees as mentors for both employment and life skills training
- Produce accessible materials to help bridge key gaps, such as getting a SIN (Social Insurance Number) and opening a bank account
- Bring services and opportunities to young people, to help in accessibility in remote or large regions

In a world where the face of work is constantly changing and the status quo no longer exists, young Canadians need tools and support to help unlock their potential and give them the start they need. This is what RBC Future Launch is committed to doing - today, and in years to come.

"Young people - Canada's future - have the confidence, optimism and inspiration to reimagine the way our country works. They just need access to the capabilities and connections to make the 21st century, and their place in it, all it should be."

- **Dave McKay,**
President and CEO, Royal Bank of Canada