

MAKING YOUTH IN GOVERNANCE 'TOTALLY NORMAL'

YOUTH CASE STUDY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CANADA (ENGLISH SPEAKING)



SUMMARY

Every year just before its Annual General Meeting (AGM), Amnesty International Canada (English Speaking) hosts the Human Rights College (HRC), bringing youth together for six days for training on campaigning, activism governance and leadership. The HRC aims to empower young activists and facilitate their active participation in Amnesty International Canada's governance. Many participants later become involved in governance roles and structures, both nationally and internationally.



STORY OF CHANGE

Amnesty International Canada held the first HRC in 2000 as an opportunity for young people to learn about campaigning, activism, and governance structures, better preparing them to become active participants in the AGM. At the HRC young people are introduced to governance opportunities and leadership positions and encouraged to apply for or participate in these by those who are currently involved. Sessions are run in an engaging, non-hierarchical way. An example of this is a session on "Speed Dating with Amnesty Leaders", where participants hear from current leaders about how and why they got involved, what they do, and how young people can get involved. It is run by former participants of the HRC, who review the past year and set the framework for the agenda. It is expected that those who attend the HRC will go on to contribute in a leadership capacity within the National Youth & Student Program and the organization in general. This may involve running a youth club at their school or within their community, organizing locally on an Amnesty International campaign or action, or participating in any number of leadership opportunities at the local, regional or national level, including governance, steering groups and advisory committees. Furthermore, all HRC participants receive an Amnesty International membership along with their HRC

registration, allowing them to participate in the AGM as full voting delegates.

"The Human Rights College empowered me to move from participant to activist. I learnt amazing skills and was encouraged to become a leader. I recommend the HRC to any youth I know who have a passion for human rights." - Lee Citty, former HRC participant

OBJECTIVES

- To increase the number of young people attending AGMs and generally raise the profile of youth and students and the National Youth & Student Program within Amnesty International Canada.
- To support youth to fully participate in AGMs, by developing their knowledge of the working process and relevant issues.
- To ensure that youth are involved in decision-making processes and actively participate in debates and voting as full participants who are actively making change happen.
- To support youth to see themselves as key decision makers and change makers.
- To build activism and campaigning skills and knowledge amongst young people.

IMPACT

- Youth participation in governance structures has increased dramatically. Former HRC participants have gone on to become presidents, vice-presidents and directors on the board and delegates at Amnesty International's International Committee Meeting.
- Youth participation at the AGM has increased from between three to five young people per AGM to between 50 and 75 young people.
- An event for training on campaigning, activism and governance has been created.
- This event is run for youth by youth.
- Youth review the previous year's event when setting the framework for the agenda for the coming HRC.

"I had the opportunity to meet youth from across the country, many of whom are very involved with Amnesty International clubs in their respective cities, and draw some inspiration from the knowledge that they have to offer." - Fatima Beydoun, former HRC participant

TIPS AND TRICKS

- *Get trust and buy-in from senior leadership!* Dedicating time, people, and financial resources to a new project can be scary, but to have success, senior leaders like the Executive Director and the AGM Chair need to directly participate (meeting HRC participants, providing training on procedures, etc.).
- *Let youth lead and be fully involved in planning!* Those who participate in the HRC can then go on to become part of the organizing team.
- *Remove financial barriers!* Providing financial support for those who request them and working with participants to raise their own funds makes more diverse participation possible.



REMZI IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Remzi Cej joined Amnesty International at 17 years of age and has since been a community group volunteer, founder of the Memorial University campus group, founder of the Amnesty International Film Festival in Newfoundland and Labrador, a field worker, a diversity task force member and workshop facilitator, director on the national board, and working group secretary on governance at two ICMs. He now serves on the resolutions committee for national AGMs. Remzi says: "The Human Rights College was a stepping stone for my involvement in the organization. It was an opportunity to meet fellow activists from across Canada interested in becoming more active in their communities. Most importantly, it was a great way to learn about the organization, its campaigns, and to be exposed to innovative engagement and advocacy techniques. Through the Human Rights College, I learned about the Fieldworker Program, where I continue to act in organizing events, mobilizing activists, and supporting internal governance activities to this date."

"The more youth have seen themselves in these leadership positions – the more youth participate – the more they see governance as a space where they can make change happen." – Shauna MacLean, National Youth & Student Coordinator

STAKEHOLDERS

- Youth are absolutely key to this project. They plan and lead it, and also become role models and advocates for youth engagement when they later progress into governance roles.
- The HRC Planning Committee is made up of 5-6 former participants who work throughout the year with the National Youth & Student Coordinator on agenda design, participation recruitment, participant engagement and the on-the-ground running of the HRC.
- Supportive senior leadership; this project requires significant resources (around CAD 40,000 per HRC and staff time) and commitment at the highest levels to believe in this project and continue to put resources toward it.

LEARN MORE!

- Contact Shauna MacLean National Youth & Student Coordinator at Amnesty International Canada (English) for more information: smaclean@amnesty.ca

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