

PAN/PARAPAN AM GAMES & YOUTH



The Pan/Parapan American Games (“the Games”), coming to the Greater Golden Horseshoe in 2015, presents an incredible opportunity for the Greater Toronto region to advance the value of sport, spur economic development and engage residents, particularly youth, in a unique, world class experience - the largest multi-sports event ever held in Canada.

Challenges

TO2015, the Games’ organizer, has four short years to create the Games and, in keeping with its mandate and vision, to achieve several tasks related to youth:

- motivate youth who are not regularly active or perhaps cynical about the Games to get active and involved;
- create distinct programming and delivery to attract youth to Games-related initiatives;
- coordinate many different internal and external agendas and programs so that the engagement process is not derailed; and
- unify the 17 municipalities involved in a shared effort that will offer equal opportunities to all Greater Toronto region youth.

Strengths

The Games’ scale and influence is expected to have an impact in the years leading up to 2015 and leave a legacy for years to come. As youth will inherit this legacy, they should play a role in its shaping. TO2015 is off to a good start, with a youth engagement strategy supported by community consultation that includes initiatives such as: establishing a youth advisory council; convening major youth and sports organizations to collaborate on a signature youth program; and encouraging existing youth programs to add a Pan/Parapan Am lens to their

initiatives. Through these and other initiatives, TO2015 seeks to work with youth to:

- create meaningful engagement for youth, such as inclusion in decision making;
- define the value proposition and spread the messages; and
- create TO2015-led actions to launch a truly lasting legacy with targeted benefits to young people.

The Summit strongly endorsed TO2015’s intention to engage youth in the Pan/Parapan Am Games, urging that this start immediately and continue throughout the planning and implementation, and continue after the Games. In working to involve youth and others, the Summit recommended that TO2015 pay particular attention to the region’s neighbourhoods (including priority neighbourhoods), its vast range of ethno-cultural groups, newcomers, those at-risk of social and economic exclusion and young people who are not pursuing an education.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

1. Build awareness and buy-in through a multi-faceted public information campaign that includes the voices of youth and engages them through existing networks and organizations.

Widespread familiarity with and buy-in to the Games’ value proposition will help TO2015 engage youth and other Greater Toronto region residents. To accelerate public awareness, Summit participants suggested that TO2015 should deliver a widespread information campaign highlighting the social, economic and environmental gains the Games will produce for youth and other parts of the community, and the opportunities for them to be engaged.

TO2105 can leverage social media to create and spread the story of the Games, particularly among younger demographics. In addition to promoting TO2105 messages, social media provides an equal-opportunity vehicle for youth and others to use text and videos to tell their own stories – what’s in it for them, their future and their community – and to help fuel others’ imagination and interest in a narrative that will counter the current preoccupation with costs.

Social media alone will not be enough: TO2015 needs multiple ways to generate and showcase the Games story from many diverse perspectives. Leveraging the region’s schools, colleges and universities and its plethora of active youth networks, youth-led and youth-serving organizations is crucial. Working with these groups will ensure that youth from a diverse set of geographic and cultural communities and interests are intentionally and properly reached, help prevent duplication, avoid exclusion and increase the community’s sense of active partnership in the Games and ownership in its city region-building legacy.

2. Provide youth with access to sport, leadership development, influence, and jobs, apprenticeships and volunteer roles; set clear measurable targets.

The Games will clearly spur youth sports and activity, but the Summit recommends that youth also be engaged through what the YMCA calls their “head, heart, feet and soul.” In schools, the Games can be built into geography and math programs, not just gym classes, and we must think more broadly about youth engagement opportunities in our communities as well.

The Summit recognized the Games’ tremendous potential to affirm the value of sport – some suggested supporting sport as an essential service or creating an annual Luminato of sports – and to surface some of the obstacles now inhibiting greater sports involvement. Many financial, infrastructure shortage and other barriers exist for athletes in our region. Para athletes in particular can face the high costs of specialized equipment and feel challenged by the persistent stigma that wheelchair athletes are not “real athletes.”

The Summit recommended that TO2015 implement a social hiring policy that targets diverse groups of youth for employment, training and volunteer opportunities and that would be binding for contractors and sub-contractors, as well as TO2015 itself. Youth can bring social media savvy to marketing and branding, pitch and execute on ideas for entrepreneurial ventures, contribute strength and ingenuity to construction, and serve as energetic and diverse ambassadors. One table at the Summit suggested taking 500

“One measure of success is the impact these Games will have on our children and youth.”

- Ian Troop, TO2015

Greater Toronto region youth to the next Games in Mexico to spur their thinking about the possibilities for 2015. Youth should be recognized and rewarded for their contributions, but the key legacy of developing employment and training opportunities will be obtaining real skills development and experience that will prepare them for future employment and education.

As well as making an explicit commitment to engage youth in all aspects of the Games, the Summit called on TO2105 to measure its success. From tracking the number of youth serving as volunteers, in paid roles and at decision-making tables, to monitoring levels of youth physical activity and participation in the Games and pre-Games programs, it is important that we hold ourselves accountable when it comes to youth engagement.

See the related backgrounder, *Youth Engagement: The Pan/Parapan Am Opportunity*, prepared for the Greater Toronto Summit 2011 at: www.civicaction.ca/publications

