



Engaging Youth:

A White Paper on Alberta's Future

Produced for:



Produced by:



Foreword

‘Engaging Youth – Creating the New Alberta’ Project presented the opportunity for youth to express their thoughts, hopes, concerns, dreams, and needs around the future of Alberta. Coming together to create one strong, solid voice, this resulting paper is a crucial starting point in identifying and addressing the evolving needs of youth in our communities. The knowledge, capacity, and creativity of our youth citizens shines through in their powerful articulation of the strengths and weaknesses that they see unfolding before them.

This heartfelt, imaginative, and authentic paper establishes a strong foundation for us all, as we work towards a co-created future. We invite you to reflect on their message. Through listening and responding to their collective recommendations, we validate their insights – this allows for deep and rich exploration of our collective knowledge, and possibilities for greater change. We have an opportunity to help the youth of Alberta navigate waters uncharted and challenging to us all, to help these voices realize their designs and their goals, and to help bridge generational or other pre-conceived gaps.

Over three thousand youth created this paper, alongside a very dedicated team from the Centre for Global Education, in partnership with the Alberta Council of Technologies, and with support from the Alberta Creativity Network and other community agencies. It represents hours of commitment and reflection. It is also an insightful and inspired thread in our ongoing conversation around the future of Alberta we would all like to see.

Haley A. Simons Chair, Project Advisory Committee Director, Alberta Council of Technologies Society





As a collective of over 2700 Albertan students, with different experiences and knowledges that span this province, we unified in our deep commitment and concern to the world around us, and developed a vision for Alberta's future.

Connecting both virtually and in-person, we chose to focus on four areas: *Work, Community, Health and Wellbeing, and Youth Voice*. Over 5000 hours of connection and collaboration took place, founded upon the consensus that as a united youth we have a voice that can and should be heard. We have developed a vision for the province that will contribute to our collective future, through defining and outlining a set of realistic achievable initiatives. We have developed a vision for the province that will contribute to our collective future, through defining and outlining a set of realistic and achievable initiatives.

Throughout this work we have also identified several outstanding questions that surround definitions, assumptions, requirements, and restrictions identified during our conversations. They highlight areas for future investigation and further discussion.

“The future may seem frightening with many challenges. If we prepare for this change, we can tackle it head on.”

- Noah, Edmonton

In order to combat the marginalization of youth voices, these instances of collaboration are essential to creating a lasting, meaningful impact. We as the youth of Alberta are excited to be involved in initiating genuine change and contributing to the progress of Alberta.

Section I: Work

Definition - *The effort made, through varying means, to provide for oneself and others.*

We, the youth of Alberta, believe that we are entitled to relevant education and training to prepare for the changing landscape of future of employment. This preparation must include elements of adaptability, possibilities for more sustainable energy, and integration strategies for new technologies.

We have identified the following trends as having a significant impact on the future we would like to see:

Wider recognition of changing job opportunities

We feel that, inherent in the education system is the notion that students must aspire to pursue one of only a few available occupations. We can be a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, or work in the oil field. Not only is this discouraging for students who may not have the means or desire to accomplish this, it is misrepresentative of the breadth of careers that exist currently or will exist in our not so far future. One popular estimate states 65% of students entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in jobs that do not yet exist¹. As such, it is unsurprising that approximately 60% of youth surveyed believe that they are not ready for the future. The youth of Alberta firmly believe that it would be beneficial to students to integrate the many types of opportunities that await us into the classroom, thus allowing us to explore for ourselves the fields of work we are interested in.

How do we define jobs, work, and careers in 2030?

Is it 'too late' for generations already in the workforce to receive the appropriate skills to navigate a changing workforce?

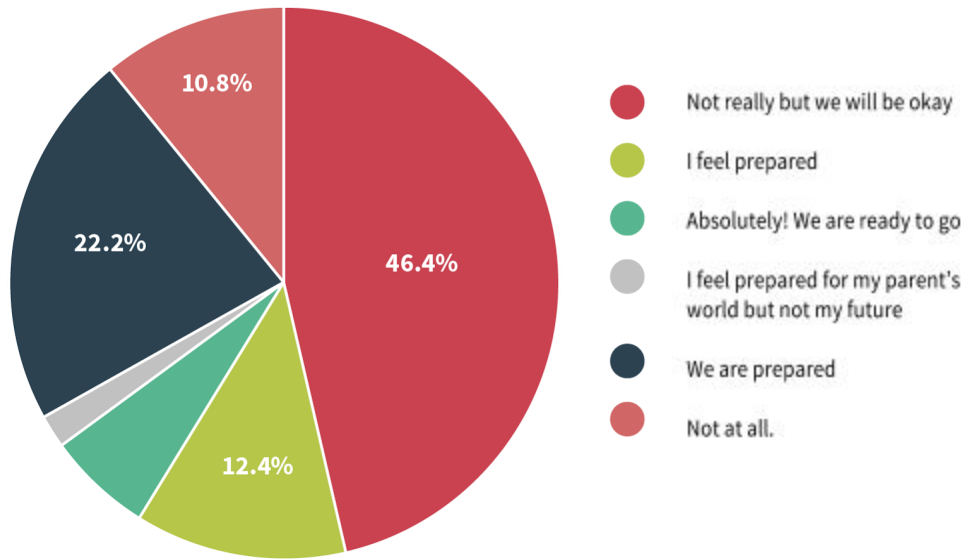
Integration of soft skills into education

In hand with an increased focus on introducing youth to a truly diverse set of future career prospects, we must ensure that it is complimented by a wider vision of learning opportunities and experiences. Many jobs in today's economy will vanish by the time today's youth reach the workforce. As such, it is essential that we - as the future of Alberta's labour force - have an education that emphasizes "soft skills." These include collaboration, critical thinking, flexibility and responsibility, and will be needed to adapt to the changing workplace. We believe that an education based on proficiency in the process of learning, not just the learning of facts, is necessary for us as the youth of today to survive and thrive in our futures.

How do we ensure we are educating beyond content knowledge to include competencies and generalizable skills?

¹ McLeod, Scott and Karl Fisch, "Shift Happens", <https://shifthappens.wikispaces.com>

DO YOU FEEL THAT SCHOOLS ARE PREPARING YOUNG ALBERTANS FOR THE FUTURE?



A future that acknowledges the role of sustainable energy

One key part of the workforce that will affect many youth and our future is Alberta’s energy sector. Currently, Alberta’s economy relies heavily on oil and gas harvesting, presenting a major challenge to the rising generation as the world moves towards sustainable alternatives. If not properly prepared Alberta will be faced with a crisis, as well as those of us who have planned to depend on this traditional source of employment. While we do not deny the benefits that the province reaps from the economic activity of the oil sands, and that this industry will continue to be an integral part of this province, we firmly believe that emerging clean energy sources should be considered as an alternative for Albertans. The youth would like to be given the opportunity to learn more about new and innovative

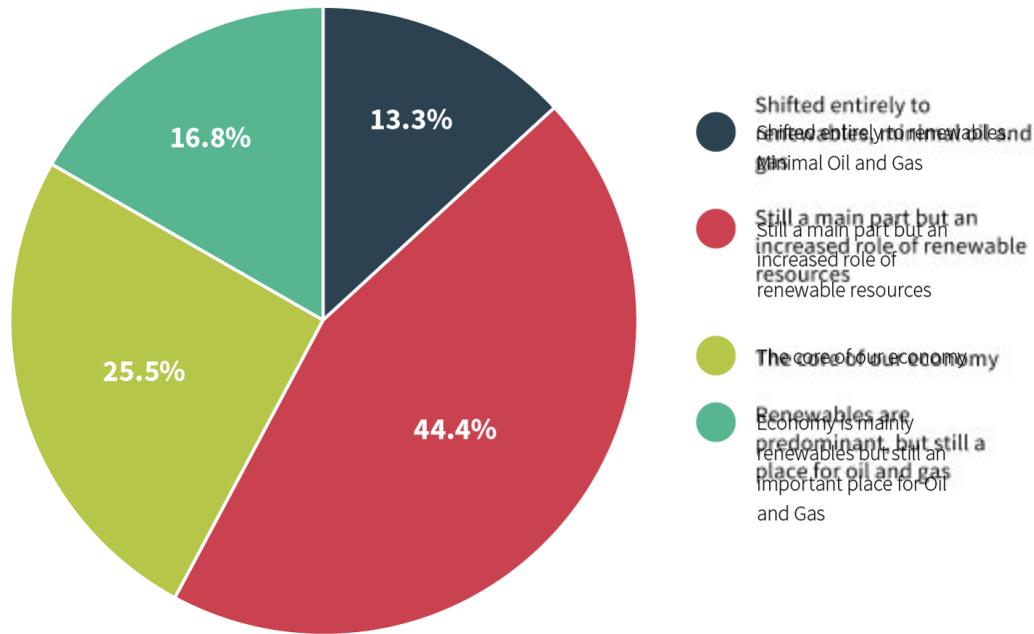
How do we advocate for long-term government commitment to diversification, within the limitations of a political election cycle?

“With the rise of more sustainable energies, students must be trained to both contribute to this developing sector as well as excel in it.”

- David, Medicine Hat

renewable energy sources throughout our education. This will provide a more stable future for Alberta, as well as present youth with a significant new areas of future work and discovery.

HOW DO YOU SEE ALBERTA OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY IN THE FUTURE OF OUR PROVINCE?



Automation and technology

Another important aspect to consider is the role emerging technologies will play in the availability of future of work. Throughout this process, we have learned that our peers are scared about the uncertainty automation brings to the workforce. We are afraid that there will not be enough jobs. We fear that the jobs we are learning to do will not even exist by the time we are in the workforce. However, along with this fear, Alberta’s youth see many new technologies as incredible opportunities for growth and development. It is essential that this rapid change be monitored in a way that provides security to those in the workforce, and we are not left behind to try and navigate a changing province that we have not been equipped to succeed in. By helping youth become acquainted with the expanding use of technology in the workforce, we can be better prepared for what lies ahead.

How do we create jobs in fields that do not require a post secondary education?

Will automation cause unemployment – despite the creation of new jobs? To what extent? Will losses be equal across wage and educational gaps?

Section II: Voice

Definition of voice - *The ability for someone to express their opinions and ideologies.*

We, the youth of Alberta, believe that increasing access to reliable information and creating meaningful engagement opportunities through modern platforms will create a future of informed, involved youth.

We have identified the following trends to be of significant impact on the future we would like to see:

Many youth do not participate when given an opportunity to express themselves

Many Albertan youth feel that our individual voices cannot incite change. Not only does this manifest in our low voter turnout - in the 2011 Provincial Election² 38% of 18-24 year olds voted, compared to 75% of voters aged 65 - 74³, it also discourages youth from entering leadership positions. While some mistake this for 'youth apathy,' with one political analyst from the University of Calgary even arguing "We have a dropout generation...They're not just dropping out of high school, they're dropping out of citizenship⁴," we fiercely disagree. We, as the future of this province, have a powerful voice and can influence the future of our province if given meaningful opportunities to. The youth of Alberta look forward

"Youth participation is vital for building strong communities. When people contribute to society and voice their concerns for their community, they are shaping their futures. The more invested youth are in their communities the more they are willing to give back to it."

-Cassandra, Edson

to the opportunity that embracing technology presents to transform age-power dynamics so that current youth can fulfill their role as active engaged citizens, and future youth can realize their full potential as change-makers. Give us the opportunity to be heard, value what we say, and the youth will demonstrate our abilities to help pioneer our future.

Is how we perceive power changing? Are there different types of power? What are they?

Why do youth feel disenfranchised about not believing we can "make substantial change"? In what ways is it perpetuated that it's only up to adults in formal positions of 'power' to implement change?

Does restricting access to any information - true or not - violate freedoms of expression and speech?

² The 2015 election results were not used because they show a statistical anomaly in youth voter trends

³ Elections Canada, Voter Turnout by Age Group

<http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2015/vtsa&document=table1&lang=e>

⁴Edmonton Journal, 'Engaging the Disengaged,' Quote from David Taras

<http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Engaging+disengaged/898464/story.html>

Many youth are excited and ready to engage in their communities, they just lack the resources and support to do so

We are passionate about what happens in Alberta; from our communities, the province, and everything in-between, the youth want to be a part of the process! However, many of us struggle to find the resources to express and explore politics in a world where the spread of information is different than any preceding generation - one study from Oxford University even suggests that 51% of people with access to social media use it as their news source. While this may disguise itself as a triumph for creating a generation of knowledgeable youth, we recognize the obstacles present in the era of 'fake news.' New algorithms designed to filter out stories we are likely to disagree with, as well as the rise of articles brimmed with sensationalism, inaccurate statistics, and often outright lies, lead to youth falling prey to misinformation and in turn, discourage us from venturing outside of our own biases. The youth of Alberta strongly believe that if we are to be prepared for our future, we need the skills to discern truth in the ever amounting information presented to us. We need the literacy to be able to recognize biases and correct misconceptions. We need the encouragement to become engaged in political dialogue. If these values are fostered, the youth know that technology and social medias represent the opportunity for future citizens to become informed and involved on a scale unseen by any other generation.

Are there substantial regional differences within Alberta on outreach methods? How do we address the divisions within our province?

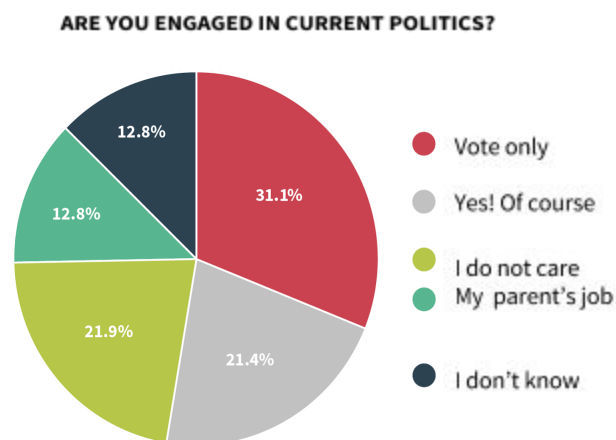
Increasing youth engagement requires engagement on different platforms

"An engaged generation of students and young adults will create an Alberta truly shaped by the opinions of those who live in it..."

- Alexander, Victoria

As youth, we are often on the forefront of many trends – fashion, music, art, and of course, social networking. While we understand that a full functioning bureaucracy may never be as fast on the scene, the youth still maintain the necessity of outreach on platforms relevant to us. Low engagement amongst young adults is not only a reality, it is a trend. However, we fiercely deny the claim that we are “drop-out citizens.” We are eager to take advantage of opportunities to share our voice, not only in the public sphere but industrial spheres as well. We recognize the potential online tools have to revolutionize the way that individuals, companies, and governments interact, and more than ever youth are excited to be engaged in a way that doesn't patronize but instead elevates inclusivity. Albertan youth are confident that if

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non-traditional outreach methods are embraced and made truly meaningful, we have the potential to be included in ways unforeseen by any other decade.

Section III: Community

Definition of community - *A community is a group of people united by a common quality with a shared desire to maintain and strengthen those connections.*

We, the youth of Alberta, believe that if we as a province invest in the promotion of healthy, unified, and diverse communities of all types, we will lay the foundations for an equitable future.

We have identified the following trends to be of significant impact on the future we would like to see:

Increasingly diverse communities can be strengthened in our differences

Inequalities in today's communities reflect issues that will only become more significant in the future as increasing immigration continues to make our communities culturally, racially, and religiously diverse; by 2031, Statistics Canada projects that close to 30% of the Canadian population and 25% of Alberta's population could be a member of the visible minority group⁵. While the youth of Alberta recognize that the communities of the future will look different than communities of the past, there are still serious issues regarding the inclusion of immigrants and minorities into long-established communities. Change is necessary to integrate multiculturalism throughout Alberta, and we are more than optimistic that by celebrating our differences we can foster communities that are inclusive and strengthened by our diversity. Albertan Youth are ceaseless supporters and leaders in the fight for equality, knowing that our future communities thrive when we embrace what makes us unique.

How do we promote multiculturalism as a value in homogenous communities? Are there dangers in not promoting it?

How do we define 'minority'?

How do we engage with a deeper understanding of intercultural learning beyond food, clothing, dance, music, etc?

Breaking down growing economic divides creates future communities where all members may succeed

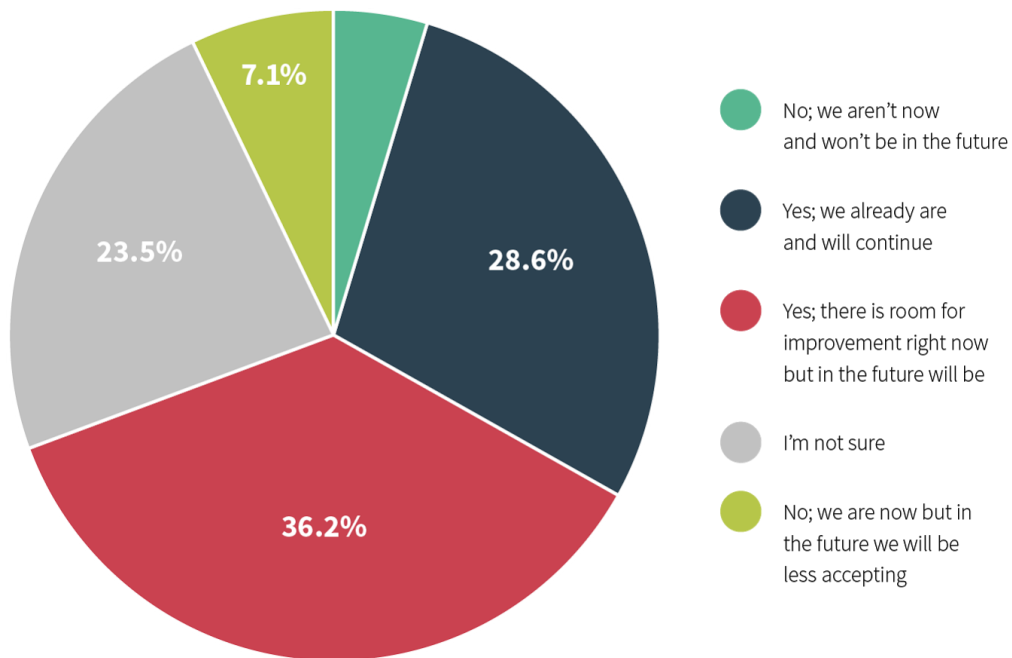
⁵Finance Alberta, 'Demographic Spotlight'

<http://finance.alberta.ca/aboutalberta/osi/demographics/Analysis-and-Reports/2011/2011-0831-visible-minority-population-trends.pdf>

Imbalances within communities have allowed for barriers between members to form. The youth of Alberta realize that these separations are significant factors that affect the unity of communities. Economic inequalities are present in every society and they influence all aspects of life, for everyone, and unfortunately in Alberta the concentration of wealth is only increasing. According to StatsCan, In 2012 the top 10% of Albertan tax filers held 50.4% of the income – the only province where the top 10% hold more than half the income. In the youth of Alberta’s future, economically diverse communities work together to create healthy environments that support all members to thrive no matter their monetary situation. However, we also realize that this is simply a dream if the cycle of poverty continues to be systematically perpetuated. The youth implore us all to act without the bitterness of stigma that surrounds conditions of poverty, recognize privileges and disadvantages that contribute to economic disparities, and work together to heal the gaps between members.

Are there ways to create economically diverse communities outside of city planning? How may we as individuals contribute?

WILL ALBERTA BE MORE FRIENDLY TO IMMIGRANTS AND PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT IN THE FUTURE?



Technological advances revolutionize communities and the way they interact

Technology has and will continue to redefine the way we think of communities. The youth recognize that a community no longer just describes a collection of nearby houses, but a collection of people united in a commonality beyond geographical boundaries. When the health of communities is considered, we as youth would like to emphasize the importance of not restricting our definitions and ensure that all groups are supported. This in turn requires that agents that seek to promote the welfare of our communities – the youth included- must remain informed and involved in the rapidly changing ways people gather.

The connections between individuals and communities cultivate change, making new forms of networking a tool for advancement. For the future of Alberta to reflect the values of its youth, we need to begin expanding these connections and embracing their ability to connect communities in unconventional ways. The involvement of more communities encourages collaboration between them, and that collaboration drives change. The youth's future of Alberta will be faced with issues that affect all communities within it, and we know the solutions to these issues can only be achieved through partnership of our communities.

When can a group of people with commonalities institute a community?

Do non-traditional communities, such as ones formed online, have different needs and rights than a 'traditional' community?

Section IV: Health and Well-Being

Definition of health and well-being - Health is the complete well being of mind and body.

We, the youth of Alberta, believe that if we promote Albertans to be knowledgeable about their physical and mental health, approach health from a place of understanding instead of stigma, and harness new technologies that stand to revolutionize the way we approach health altogether, we may contribute to future generations of healthy Albertans.

We have identified the following trends to be of significant impact on the future we would like to see:

Technological advances can innovate health

Health care in Alberta does not look the same as it did 20 years ago; nor does the food we eat, the medications we take, the way we exercise, or the way we treat mental health. In 20 years, it will look different as well. Innovations in the way we promote the wellbeing of Albertans, like CRISPER, are rapidly changing the future of our province and being put into applications. For example, genome editing technologies are being implemented in the medical field to treat illnesses that are caused by deficient DNA cells, from cancer to Down Syndrome, Hepatitis B and many other DNA related dispositions. As a province, we must take action to spread awareness of these technologies - and their controversies. We as youth are an untapped resource if we lack the knowledge to contribute to the advancement of health, and we as a province are uninformed consumers if we are illiterate in how we may better ourselves and families. Our best future lies in one where not only are treatments modernized, but the way we are taught about health is modernized as well.

What roles do we as Albertans have in determining the ethics of new treatments?

Increasing rates of Drug Abuse indicate a need to modernize mitigative strategies

Drug abuse in Alberta is a serious trend that must be mitigated. There were 51 overdose deaths related to fentanyl across Alberta between Jan. 1 and Feb. 11 — nearly double the 28 deaths in the same period in 2016⁶, according to new interim data from Alberta Health. We, as youth, are particularly vulnerable to substance exposure and abuse - and this disturbing trend in Alberta is affecting us and our peers. We need to reevaluate the way we look at drug abuse, the future of youth depends on it. While we alone may not be able to develop a comprehensive strategy, one message amongst the youth resonated: the solution must come from a place of

Are there different levels of access to supports in Alberta?

⁶Calgary Herald, 'Calgary Leads Alberta...Fentanyl Related Deaths'

<http://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/calgary-leads-alberta-with-25-fentanyl-related-deaths-in-first-six-weeks-of-2017>

understanding, not stigma. As generations continue and contexts shift, we must be constantly adapting how we approach drug abuse. To us it is clear - if we do not intervene, the overdose rates will only increase, and future families will be affected.

Changing environment's effect on the health of future generations

We the youth, as with many others, are concerned about the effect of our changing environment on our health. In 2014, Alberta had the highest level of air pollutants for 5 out of 6 chemicals measured in the country⁷, and since 1990 Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 56%⁸. As Alberta's climate continues to shift in unforeseen ways, the youth firmly believe that an increase in long term studies are necessary to protect future generations from detrimental physical and mental health effects, and are also inextricable in preparing future families to be healthy in a world that is changing around them. But it must not stop there. We hold strong that, as a province, we must always keep the future's best interest at heart – and this includes acting to mitigate climate change, pollutants, and the degradation of our natural landscapes. We must work together for the sake of Albertan families we may never meet, but whose lives we must certainly touch.

Mental health

Though we discussed the importance of mental health a great deal, it was particularly hard to discuss in a future lens. While we may imagine that in 30 years physical health will be reshaped by new GMOs or industrial methods have eliminated pollution, but what does the revolution of mental health look like? We might not be able to say, but we must emphasize that mental well-being is no less important than physical health - and our mental health is struggling. According to CBC, from January to June 2014 there were 252 suicides in Alberta.

For the future of Alberta, the suicide epidemic needs to be addressed because our future leaders are at stake and the generations after.

-Martina, Wabasca

During the same period this year, there were 327. To combat this trend, the way we support healthy interactions must be modernized, and we must dispel stigmas surrounding mental health. We are particularly concerned about the role of increasing social medias in solidifying feelings of inadequacy and perpetuating these stigmas, and leaving more Albertans vulnerable to cyberbullying.

The youth hold fast that if we, as a province, are to have a thriving future, we must not neglect mental health issues that prevent individuals, families, and even entire communities from sharing in a successful future.

What jurisdictions have laws on cyberbullying? What are challenges to enforcing them

Is there technology to support a reduction in pollution? If so, why isn't it being applied consistently?

⁷ Environment Canada, Air Pollutant Emissions <https://www.ec.gc.ca/indicateurs-indicators/default.asp?lang=en&n=E79F4C12-1>

⁸Environment Canada, Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Province and Territory <https://www.ec.gc.ca/indicateurs-indicators/default.asp?lang=en&n=18F3BB9C-1>

In conclusion, as industrial, governmental, and private agents of change shape the way our province emerges in the coming years, we the youth are asking to be included. We do so with optimism towards developing technologies, confidence in our diverse communities, care for the well-being of our families, and eagerness to be engaged.

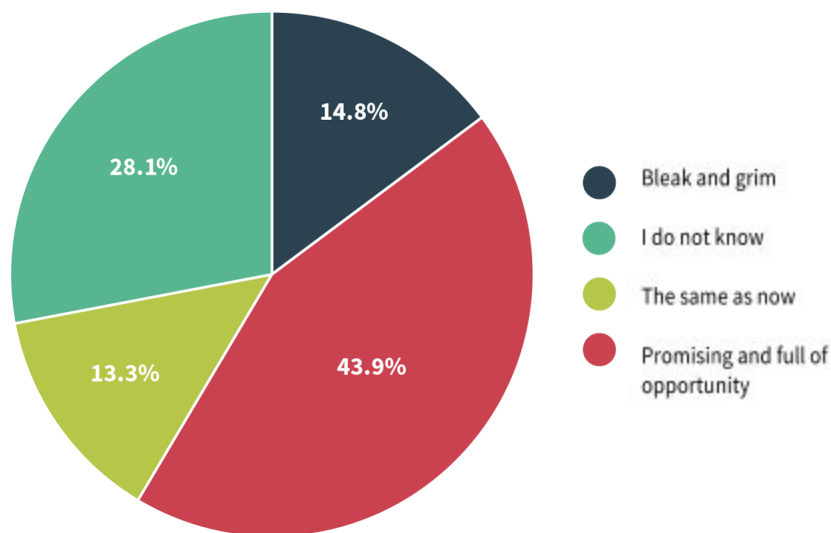
Alberta's youth don't just shape the future, we are the future. We want to create a better province for ourselves and our children and with the technology and skills we now have, we can!

-Alixaudria, High Prairie

Writing this paper has given a voice to us, the youth of Alberta, in guiding the future of our province. We want to create positive change, for ourselves and future generations, and with the technology and skills we have now, we can.

Alberta's youth do not just shape the future, we are the future, and we officially bring our voice to the table.

WHEN YOU ENVISION THE FUTURE, WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?



“Equip us to be critical, support us to be engaged, and we will lead the way to a future of involved and informed citizens.”

Alixaudria, High Prairie