

STRATHCONA COUNTY'S STRATEGY FOR NEXT GEN



FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN

PREFACE: WELCOME TO STRATHCONA COUNTY'S STRATEGY FOR NEXT GEN

Welcome to Strathcona County's Strategy for Next Gen! This strategy is unique in that as we worked to develop it, it grew to be some other things, in addition to a strategy – It also became a story about a community journey and a guidebook for action to support Next Gen into the future. This document will take you through the story of the journey that led to the creation of the Strategy for Next Gen, and tell you about our next chapters and the next steps we will take as a community to empower and inspire our community's population of Next Gen.

You'll notice that this strategy is unconventional as it uses a principle-focused approach to promote positive outcomes for Strathcona County's Next Gen. Using a principle-focused approach is valuable when

guiding large-scale, complex, and community-led social change. It enables nimbleness and an ability to respond to changes (surprising events such as COVID-19, for example) and new and emerging needs, while the principles also act as a compass to keep things on track as we move forward into the unknown.¹

Read on to learn about our journey as a community and how we plan to continue to use the power of principles and collective action to create a safe, supported and connected community to inspire Strathcona County's Next Gen! We'll also share some stories about exciting actions that have already occurred as part of the Next Gen Strategy journey.

1. Patton, M. Q. (2017). Principles-focused evaluation: The GUIDE. Guilford Publications





ABOUT THE AUTHORS

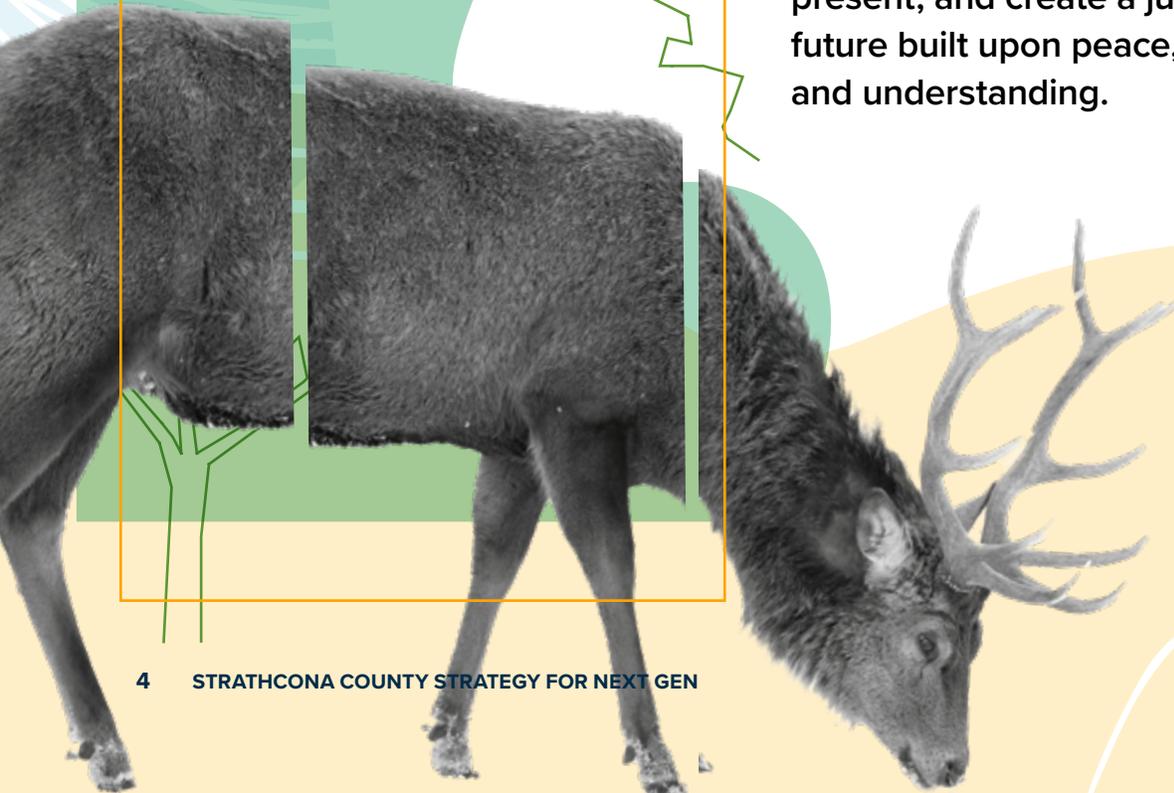
The authors of this strategy are Strathcona County Next Gen and the organizations that support Next Gen. The Strategy came to life because of the insightful feedback and innovative ideas they generously took the time to share during strategy engagement.

FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN



NEXT GEN AND THEIR ALLIES ARE TREATY PEOPLE

This strategy was developed with and for Strathcona County's Next Gen, who reside on Treaty Six Territory. All Strathcona County residents are Treaty people and have a responsibility to become aware of our shared history and understand the spirit and intent of Treaty 6. By doing so we may honour the past, be mindful of the present, and create a just and caring future built upon peace, friendship, and understanding.



SAY HELLO TO THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY OF THE NEXT GEN STRATEGY



Next Gen

Strathcona County's Next Gen are residents in our community who identify as youth or young adults. Typically, between the ages of 14 to 29, they are diverse, passionate, creative, resilient, empathetic, and inspired!



Next Gen Ally

Next Gen allies are supportive community members who listen, learn from, and support Next Gen. They get feedback from Next Gen and support Next Gen to get involved in building the future of our community. A group of Next Gen allies came together as a working group to begin developing the Next Gen Strategy.



Next Gen Serving Organizations

Next Gen serving organizations are the organizations that exist in Strathcona County to promote positive social change by providing opportunities, programs and supports for Next Gen.



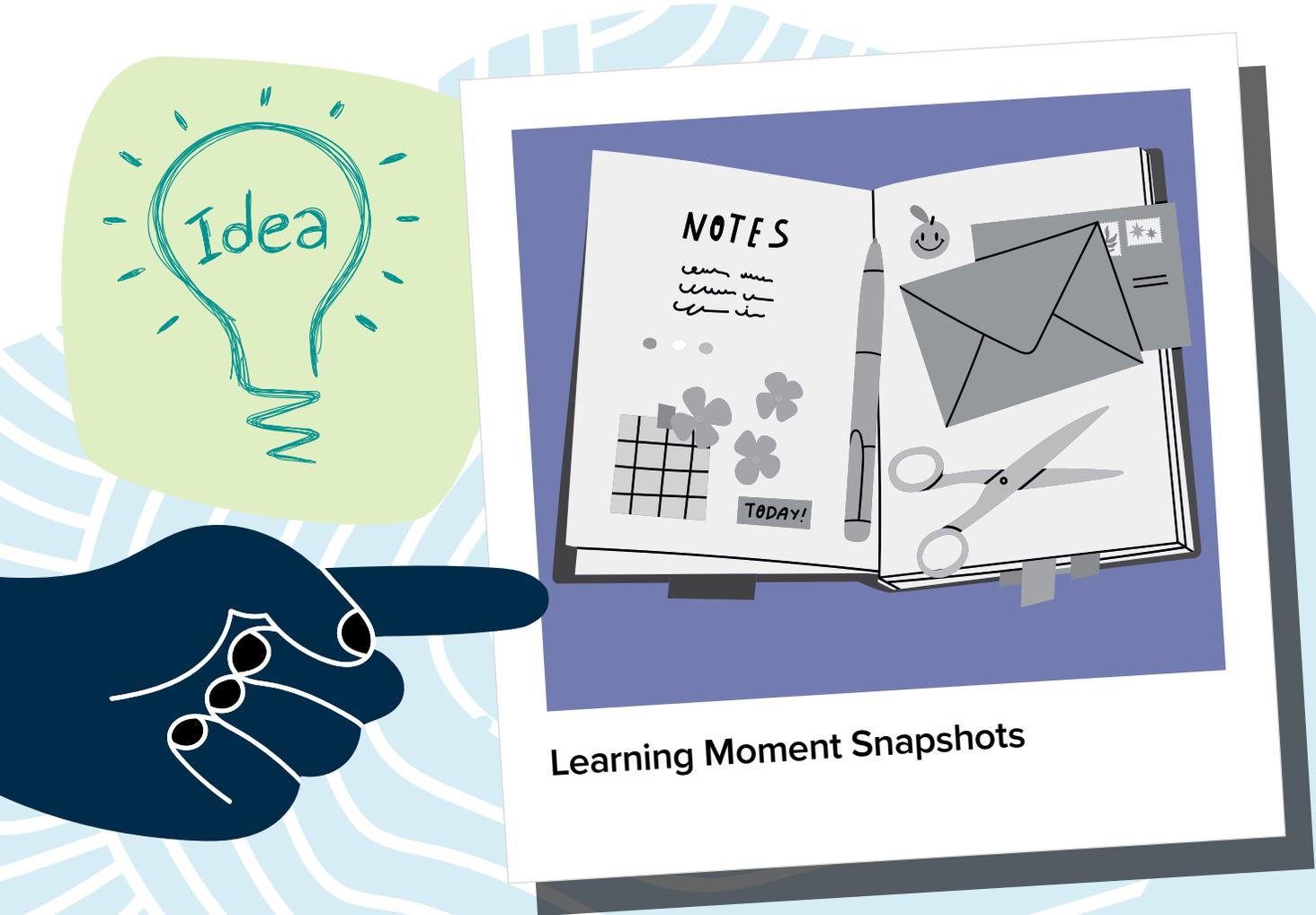
Strathcona County Council

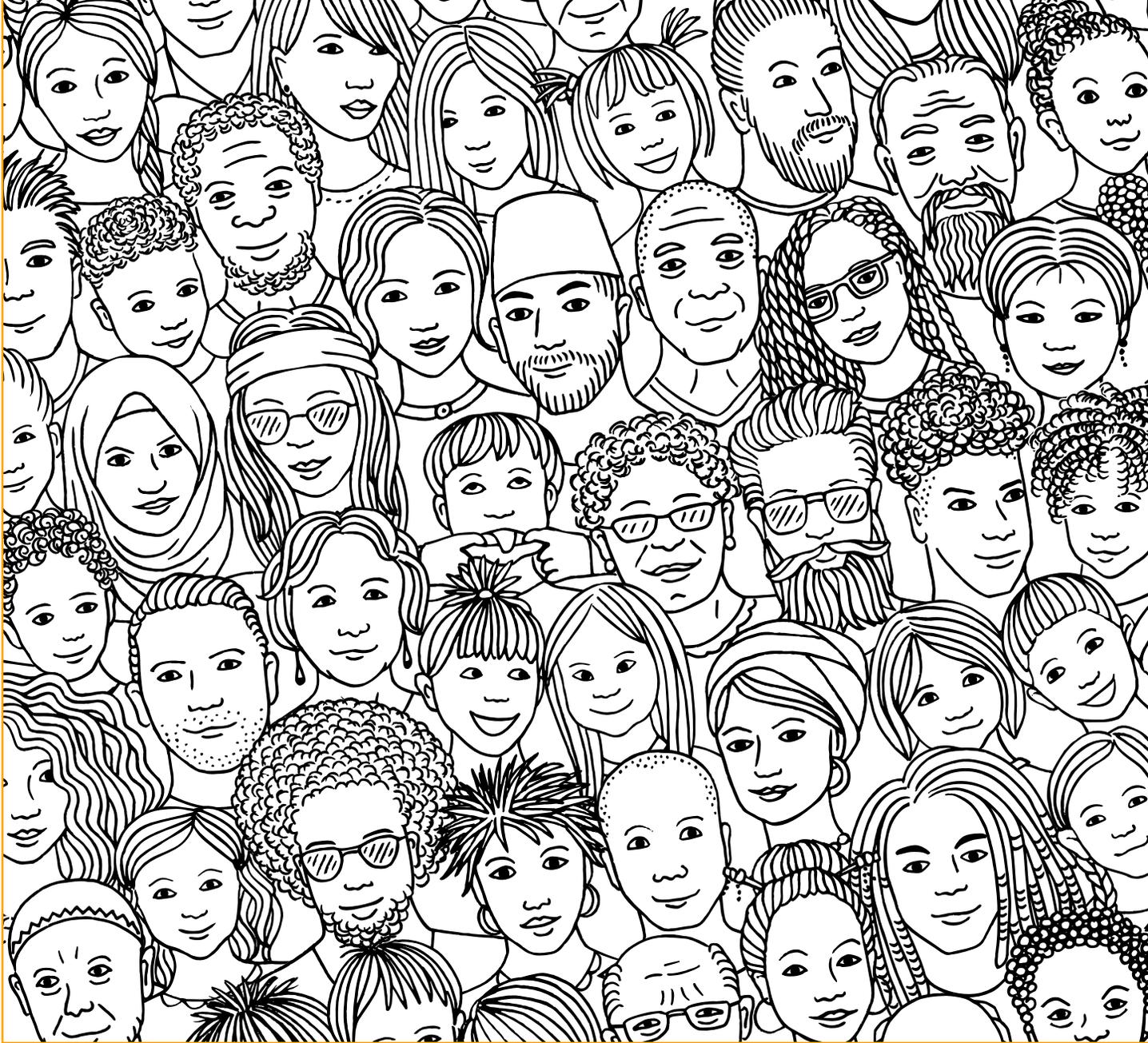
Strathcona County Council is the decision-making body for municipal services. Strathcona County Council is elected by all Strathcona County residents who vote in the civic election.

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LOOK OUT FOR **LEARNING MOMENTS!**

Like any good story, this story is not linear! It is filled with roadblocks and bumps in the road that were pivotal learning moments as we moved forward during strategy development. Throughout this story, we will highlight some of the experiences and challenges we encountered as a community that were foundational to determining the direction of the strategy. These events are captured as **Learning Moment Snapshots**.





Next Gen add colour to our community! Colour this page and share your creation with us on Instagram by tagging **@strathconextgen**

FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN

CHAPTER 1

WHY A STRATEGY FOR NEXT GEN?



Next Gen
Strategy



In 2019, Strathcona County Council recognized Next Gens' unique challenges and experiences and decided to prioritize connecting with this population to hear about the issues and needs that were top of mind for them.

This led Council to pass a motion to conduct a study called the Youth Needs and Assets Assessment (YNAA), which explored existing opportunities for youth and young adults in Strathcona County while identifying areas for improvement. The YNAA provided an overarching recommendation to develop a youth strategy for Strathcona County in partnership with the community and youth to address a collective commitment that:

“ Youth feel connected, included and supported and access a range of programs and services that meet their needs without having to leave Strathcona County.

FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN

CHAPTER 2

FOR NEXT GEN, DEVELOPED BY ADULTS



Responding to the recommendation of the YNAA, adults from Next Gen serving organizations and adult Next Gen allies, rallied together to begin creating a strategy for Strathcona County's Next Gen. Some Next Gen allies began to meet regularly as a Next Gen Strategy working group.

Through meetings, conversations, and experiencing a few roadblocks, it became clear that there was no way to create a strategy that would effectively respond to the unique experiences, challenges, and values of Next Gen without involving **Next Gen as leaders** in the development of the strategy.

Another important learning early on in our journey was that traditional project management approaches such as deciding at the start on outcomes and priorities for action did not stick. There was a desire to have a project that was emergent and allowed us to learn as we go to create a new future that is truly designed by youth. This also led to the realization that all the project's decisions were starting to be led by a set of common principles, such as a principle of being Next Gen led. We embraced the idea that the strategy was becoming principle driven and that principles were going to be our compass and the heart of the strategy.



FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN



Learning Moment #1

A Youth Led Visual Identity

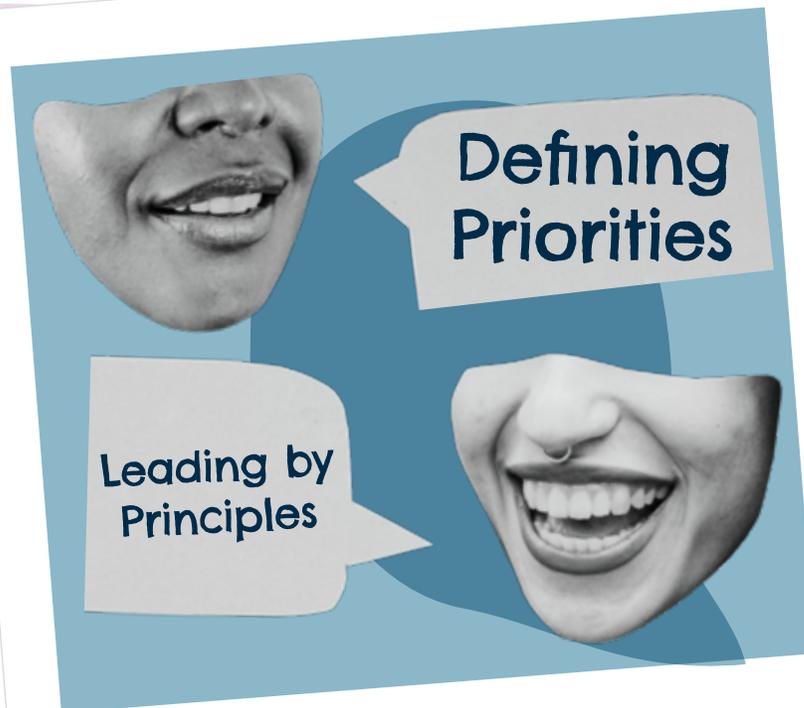
Adult allies from Next Gen serving organizations began developing a visual identity and recruitment materials for the Next Gen initiative. The adult allies created images and messages that we were sure would inspire and attract youth and young adults. We field tested our work and we received feedback from Next Gen that our graphics didn't speak to or resonate with them. We were surprised! Actually, it's probably more accurate to say we were shocked! We had worked hard on our visual identity!

We reflected on the feedback from Next Gen and we realized that we needed Next Gen themselves to guide visual identity creation. The adult allies stepped back and began to work with a youth graphic designer who designed and created amazing content that resonated well with Next Gen.

Early on in our journey, adult allies from Next Gen serving organizations began meeting regularly in a working group. Adult allies from Next Gen serving organizations tried to move forward using traditional project management approaches, such as defining clear project objectives and priorities at the beginning of the project.

Two of our team members planned a facilitated discussion focused on developing our project priorities. That session took a surprising turn. All working group members felt strong resistance during the process. We shared our concerns with each other and through dialogue realized that we were all experiencing a conflict between traditional project management approaches and principles of being Next Gen led and learning and journey oriented.

This was a turning point for our group and we realized that we needed to facilitate a process through which Next Gen, themselves, would define the priorities for the Next Gen Strategy over time. This experience also demonstrated the power of principles to guide our work on the strategy since it was reflection on the principles of being Next Gen led and learning and journey oriented that had shaped this realization and guided our decisions about our project approach.



Learning Moment #2
Moving Further Towards Being Youth Led
and Principle Driven

CHAPTER 3

CAPTURING NEXT GEN VOICES USING PEER TO PEER LEADERSHIP: NEXT GEN AT THE CENTRE



We knew that Next Gen needed to be at the centre of the Next Gen Strategy and so an engagement was carried out with youth and young adults to capture their voices and priorities. The findings from the engagement were then developed into the Strathcona County Strategy for Next Gen so that all parts of the strategy, including strategy principles and priorities are defined by our County's Next Gen.

Alongside creation of the strategy, an initiative called Strathcona County Next Gen was also established as an opportunity for Next Gen to take action in their community on issues that they care about. Ultimately this approach will facilitate action on the Strategy for Next Gen and create Next Gen driven change in Strathcona County.

Next Gen engagement sessions were held in 2021 to gather feedback to guide strategy development. Next Gen allies from Next Gen serving organizations facilitated the engagement sessions and were instrumental to the success of the engagement, because of their ability to create a safe and welcoming atmosphere for their peers and encourage meaningful dialogue. Topics discussed in engagement sessions included mental health, transportation, and gathering spaces for youth and young adults. Through engagement sessions, diverse and passionate Strathcona County Next Gen shared their thoughts, needs, ideas, priorities, and vision for the future.

The following chapters describe how Next Gen voices and the information they shared in engagement sessions became the Strategy for Next Gen and the Next Gen Initiative!

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CHAPTER 4

CREATING A STRATEGY FOR NEXT GEN



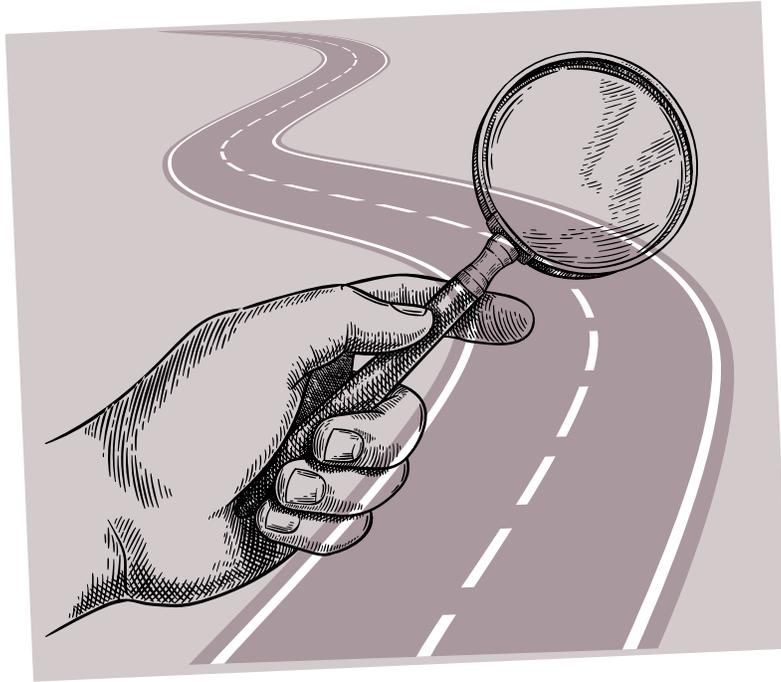
In an earlier chapter, we shared that a set of guiding principles for the youth strategy had begun to emerge through allies' work in the youth strategy working group. These guiding principles were also evident during engagement with Next Gen and in ongoing collaboration between Next Gen serving organizations and Next Gen allies.

Oftentimes, principles emerge from shared experiences, values and engagement. In complex projects, such as the development of the Strategy for Next Gen, principles help to inform and guide behaviours by telling us how to act. Being principles-driven also helps groups to navigate the uncertainties of complex systems, adapt where necessary and be flexible in response to changes in a journey.²

2. Patton, M. Q. (2017). Principles-focused evaluation: The GUIDE. Guilford Publications



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Learning Moment #3

Collaboration and the Power of Principles

Collaboration takes time and when individuals come together from various organizations they also come with their own lenses and their own way of doing things. Navigating the differences in organizations' processes (e.g., Governmental processes versus non-profit organizational processes) can be challenging, especially when you don't have clear outcomes to follow.

However, what we learned as a team is that our principles are strong enough to guide us through the winding roads of collaboration. In fact, having a shared set of community principles enables us to make decisions efficiently. When facing a decision, we ask ourselves, "Is this in alignment with our principles?" and/or "What action(s) can we take together to be in alignment with our principles?" The principles are a useful tool to help us quickly move forward in our decision-making and shared work.

PRINCIPLES

The principles that emerged through engagement with Next Gen and Next Gen allies have become the heart of the Strathcona County Strategy for Next Gen. These principles will serve as a compass that helps our community to continue to navigate our way to a future that supports the holistic wellbeing of Next Gen. They can also be seen as a helpful lens to apply to programs, policies and services in our community that support or impact Next Gen.

Next Gen led

Next Gen have the right to be heard, respected and to have the ability to influence decisions that impact them now and into the future. Therefore, Next Gen Allies have a responsibility to empower Next Gen to participate in decision-making processes that affect them.

Next Gen-centred and strengths-based

Next Gen need access to supports that reflect and respond to their unique needs and strengths. Next Gen are assets to the community and Next Gen serving organizations can centre Next Gen in their work by valuing their strengths and involving them in program development.

Collaborative and collective action-oriented

Next Gen, Next Gen led groups, and Next Gen serving organizations have a responsibility to work together to improve the ways in which systems, services, and networks interact to support the collective wellbeing of Next Gen and to tackle common issues.

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PRINCIPLES

Community-led

All residents have a role and responsibility in championing and actualizing a Strathcona County where Next Gen feel safe, supported, and connected. The design and delivery of programs and services must grow from shared local visions, build on community strengths and through collaborative local leadership. Community-wide involvement and commitment will help ensure innovation and the achievement of the desired long-term results.

Learning and journey-oriented

Meaningful community change takes time and it is important to reflect on learnings to improve community outcomes. Through testing, prototyping ideas, and reflecting, Next Gen and those who support Next Gen will learn what ideas, initiatives and supports resonate with and better meet the needs of Strathcona County's Next Gen.

Relationship-centred

Authentic interpersonal relationships are fundamental to building respect, trust and inclusion. Therefore, the development of relationships among Next Gen, between Next Gen and social service agencies, and the community at large, is the cornerstone of long-term impact and change in Strathcona County.

PRINCIPLES

Inclusivity and belonging-centred

Next Gen have a right to feel truly welcomed, valued and respected in all environments, including in community, school, and paid work environments and while accessing services and supports.

Diversity and person-centred

Strathcona County's Next Gen are diverse in relation to identity factors, including sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, income, culture, race, ethnicity, geographic locations and age. Next Gen serving organizations have a responsibility to consider and celebrate diversity when designing and delivering programs and services for Next Gen. Next Gen serving organizations also have a responsibility to consider affordability and accessibility needs so that all Next Gen can receive the support they need to thrive.

Building on the foundation

There are many existing programs and services in the community that support the well-being of Next Gen. Next Gen serving organizations need to connect and collaborate with each other to build upon what is already available.

FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN

PRIORITIES

In addition to a set of guiding principles, priority areas that are currently top of mind for Next Gen were identified from their feedback during engagement sessions. These priority areas, grounded in the voices of Next Gen, have become a foundational element of the Strategy for Next Gen. To advance well-being for Next Gen, the community of Strathcona County will focus efforts on addressing the following priority areas:

COMMUNICATION

Provide accessible communications materials that connect Next Gen to community supports, programs and resources.

Next Gen recognize that many supports and resources exist in the community, however, there isn't a centralized communications platform for Next Gen to help them easily navigate existing supports. Creating a centralized communications platform for Next Gen and ensuring organizations tailor their communications to the unique needs of Next Gen will help ensure their connection to appropriate community supports.



MENTAL HEALTH

Provide accessible mental health supports and resources for Next Gen that meet the diverse needs of Next Gen.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Strathcona County Next Gen identified mental health as one of their top priorities. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has heightened existing mental health challenges and contributed to mental health concerns for Next Gen. Strathcona County Next Gen need to be supported to access mental health and wellness services tailored to their unique needs and experiences.



PRIORITIES

EMPLOYMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Empower Next Gen to meaningfully participate in the local economy.

Strathcona County Next Gen need opportunities that enable them to explore their passions and interests and experiences that support them to enter the economy. Providing Next Gen with work-integrated learning opportunities and encouraging lifelong learning will support Strathcona County's Next Gen to thrive in our increasingly competitive economy. In addition, supporting employment and entrepreneurship for our community's Next Gen facilitates the transition to adult autonomy.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Prioritize actions that protect the environment for Next Gen and consider the needs of future generations.

Environmental sustainability and climate change are top priorities for many Strathcona County Next Gen. Next Gen are invested in supporting environmental decisions and actions that will create a future that reflects their values.

FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN

PRIORITIES

COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

Create meaningful opportunities for Next Gen to participate in and experience their community and for their voices to be valued and acted upon.

Strathcona County Next Gen need access to spaces, places, and experiences where their identity is valued and respected and where they can experience community connections.

All Next Gen need active community networks that meet their social and emotional needs.



VALUING NEXT GEN

Value the unique talents and skills of Next Gen to strengthen community cohesion and belonging.

Next Gen are recognized as being a connected, open-minded and resilient generation. Supporting and valuing the unique perspectives, gifts, and talents of Next Gen will help to develop a more innovative, diverse, and inclusive Strathcona County.

CHAPTER 5

CHANGE STORIES



Now you may be saying to yourself..“*I don’t get it, how can principles lead the community to action?*”. Don’t worry, this can all be a little fuzzy. To show how principles and meaningful action are very closely tied, we will highlight a few change stories that illustrate how the Next Gen strategy principles have been applied to the priorities for action to create impact and change.

Strathcona County Next Gen Website and Instagram

PRIORITY AREAS:

Communication; Community and Belonging

In engagement sessions, Strathcona County Next Gen identified a need for a central online space where they could learn about community events, services, resources and opportunities. They shared that they knew there were resources and supports available to them in the community, but they didn't always know where to find information about them. In response to this need, the @StrathcoNextGen Instagram page, website and e-newsletter were developed. Since these platforms were established, followers have been growing and Next Gen have shared that they are receiving access to timely and relevant information about the abundant community resources and events in Strathcona County. Further, these online spaces are fostering a sense of community and connection for Next Gen.

PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

- This action responds to the principle of being **Next Gen-centred** by creating relevant and accessible communication platforms for Next Gen.
- There are many great Next Gen oriented opportunities and resources that exist in Strathcona County. This action responds to the principle of **Building on the Foundation** by creating platforms that highlight these existing and abundant community resources.
- Website: www.strathconextgen.ca
Instagram: @StrathcoNextGen

Next Gen Leadership Team

PRIORITY AREAS:

Community and Belonging; Valuing Next Gen

Following engagement sessions throughout 2021 and in response to learnings during our project journey, the Next Gen Initiative was re-envisioned to shift from a space where youth were sharing feedback and insights to a space where youth were leading and taking action on issues they care about.

In early 2022, Strathcona County Next Gen were invited to join the Next Gen Leadership Team. The Leadership Team was established soon after and Next Gen Leadership Team members have led and participated in monthly Next Gen Leadership Team meetings where they discuss issues they care about and take action in the community by building online awareness, hosting events, and advocating in the community about youth issues. For example, in June, 2022, the Next Gen Leadership Team hosted a community clean up event in response to their priority of environmental sustainability.

PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

- The Next Gen Leadership Team embodies the principles of being **Next Gen led** and **Next Gen-centred** and **Strengths-based**. The Leadership Team explores group strengths and interests to inform priorities for action in the community.

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Strathcona County BGC Youth Hub

PRIORITY AREAS:

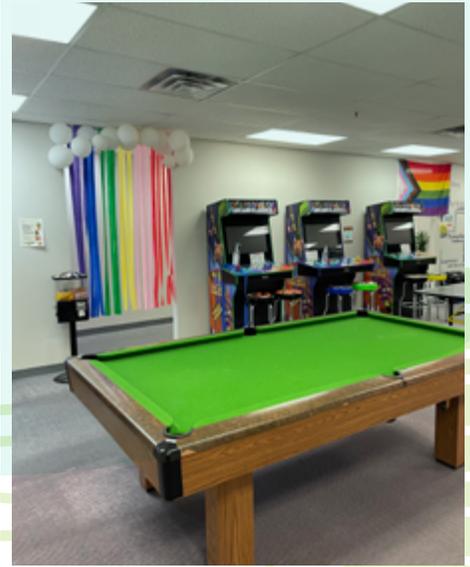
Community and Belonging; Valuing Next Gen

In engagement sessions, Next Gen shared a need for gathering spaces that are designed by Next Gen and where diverse Next Gen feel included and like they belong. Reflecting on our principle of building on the foundation, we recognized that there was already important work underway in the County to respond to this existing need. In 2020, Strathcona County BGC, a partner organization involved in developing the Strategy for Next Gen, opened the doors of the CanTeen Youth Hub to Strathcona County Next Gen!

The CanTeen is a safe, accessible and inclusive space for Strathcona County's Next Gen to hangout, play some games, and make connections. When you enter the BGC youth hub, it radiates inclusivity and fun! You are greeted with a smile, and you can tell that Next Gen feel like it's their own and take pride in their space. The CanTeen youth hub will continue to be used as a community-driven project that can be catalyzed to respond to the need of community and belonging for Next Gen.

PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

- The CanTeen Youth Hub illustrates the principle of being **relationship centered**. It's staff develop meaningful relationships with Next Gen and facilitate connections between Next Gen.
- The CanTeen Youth Hub also illustrates the principle of being **diversity and person-centered** and is uniquely designed to foster a sense of belonging. Programs are offered in the Youth Hub that celebrate the unique identities of Next Gen.



FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN

CHAPTER 6

THE REST IS STILL UNWRITTEN...





BE A CHANGE MAKER! HELP US CONTINUE THE STORY

I, _____ , am / can
(insert your name)

contribute _____
(insert personal strengths here)

I see the following gaps in the community for Next Gen:



We can take action on these gaps by:

↑ Please pull this page out ↑

**BE A
CHANGE
MAKER!
HELP US
CONTINUE
THE STORY**

↓ Please pull this page out ↓

This strategy was developed to inspire Next Gen, Next Gen serving organizations, and Next Gen allies to take up the principles that our Next Gen have developed and create action on the priority areas they identified.

The strategy reflects a stage in time – as the community continues to work together, adapt and grow, and as things around us change (as they always do) our principles and our priorities may adapt and evolve so that the strategy always remains relevant.

As the change stories in the previous chapter show, there has already been important action taken in the community to address the priorities identified in the Strategy for Next Gen. Our journey is still in motion, however, and there is still work to do. In fact, this strategy doesn't have an ending! It is our goal that the work of the Strategy for Next Gen becomes firmly embedded in our community over time and becomes who we are in Strathcona County, a community where Next Gen thrive now and into the future.



FOR NEXT GEN » BY NEXT GEN



HUGE THANKS TO STRATHCONA COUNTY'S CHAMPIONS FOR NEXT GEN!



Ardrrossan Agriculture and Recreation Society



The altView Foundation



BGC Strathcona County



Big Brothers, Big Sisters Strathcona County



Elk Island Catholic Schools



Heartland Alliance Church



Kings Athletic Club



Strathcona County Library



Economic Development and Tourism, Family and Community Services, Transit, Recreation Parks and Culture

For more information and ongoing updates about this project, visit: strathconextgen.ca