

# ACCESS Open Minds National Youth Council: A Pan-Canadian Youth Partnership Strategy

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## Background of our council

- Diverse youth council created in 2014 consisting of individuals with self-identified lived mental health experience who are motivated in transforming youth mental health services
- Members are located throughout Canada and represent many walks of life, values, and beliefs
- Communicate through social media platforms to maintain continued collaboration
- Meet annually to determine youth council priorities

### Vision

To support youth and the ACCESS Open Minds initiative by giving youth a voice in their mental health care, design, delivery, research and evaluation.

ACCESS Open Minds National Youth Council



ACCESS Open Minds Sites Across Canada

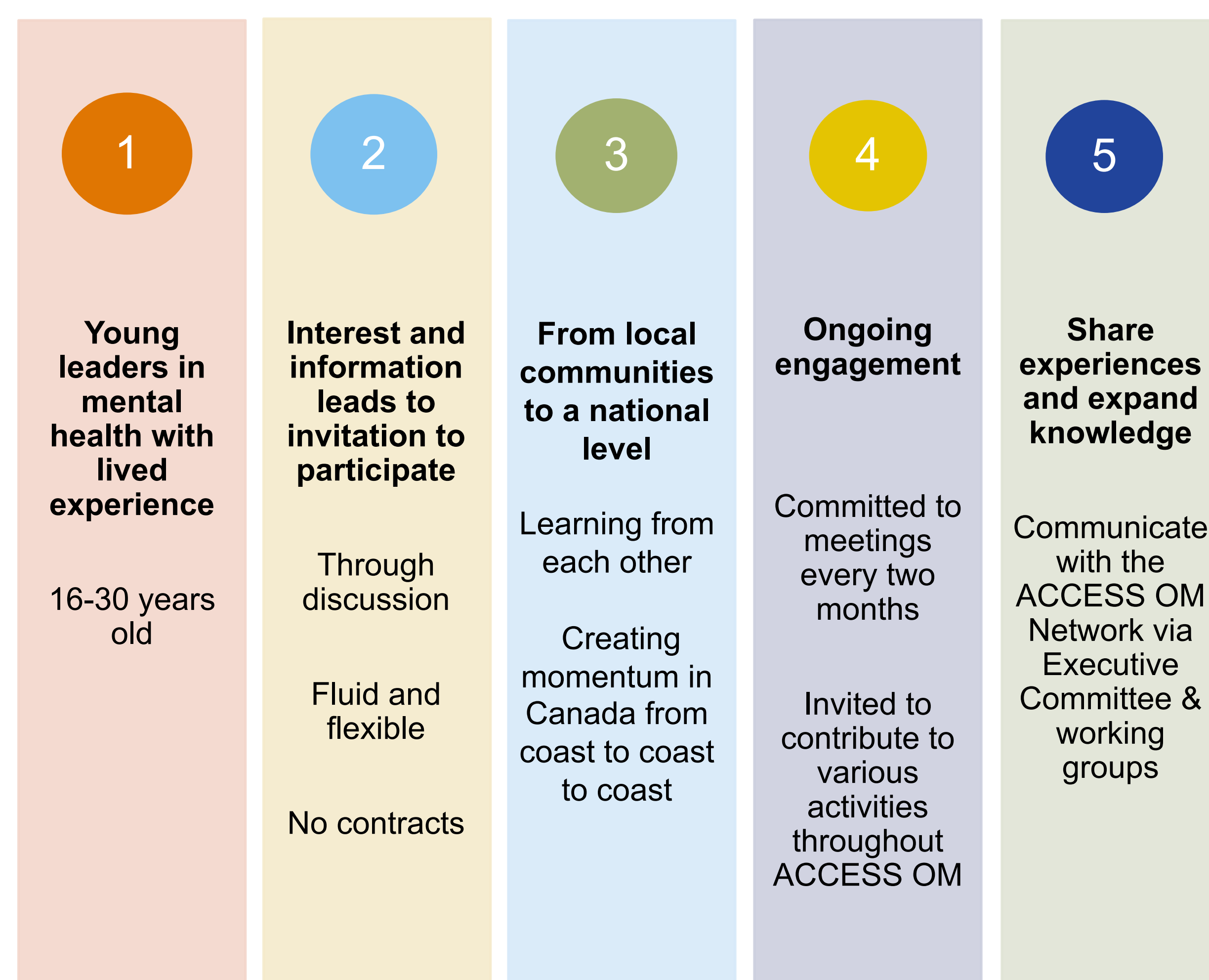


## Observations and Challenges

- CHALLENGE: Different backgrounds and cultures leads to different understandings of mental health and what methods should be pursued to address them.
- CHALLENGE: The geographic distance between communities limits in person team bonding, and the development of cohesiveness of the group.
- INSIGHT: However, the diversity of members illustrate that youth across Canada are invested in partnering with researchers, decision makers and service providers to inform meaning and lasting changes in the youth mental health system.
- CHALLENGE: Timing and the pace of the project has been seen as a barrier to authentic youth engagement.
- INSIGHT: Making the case that investment into youth mental health leads to better services regardless of timing and pace.

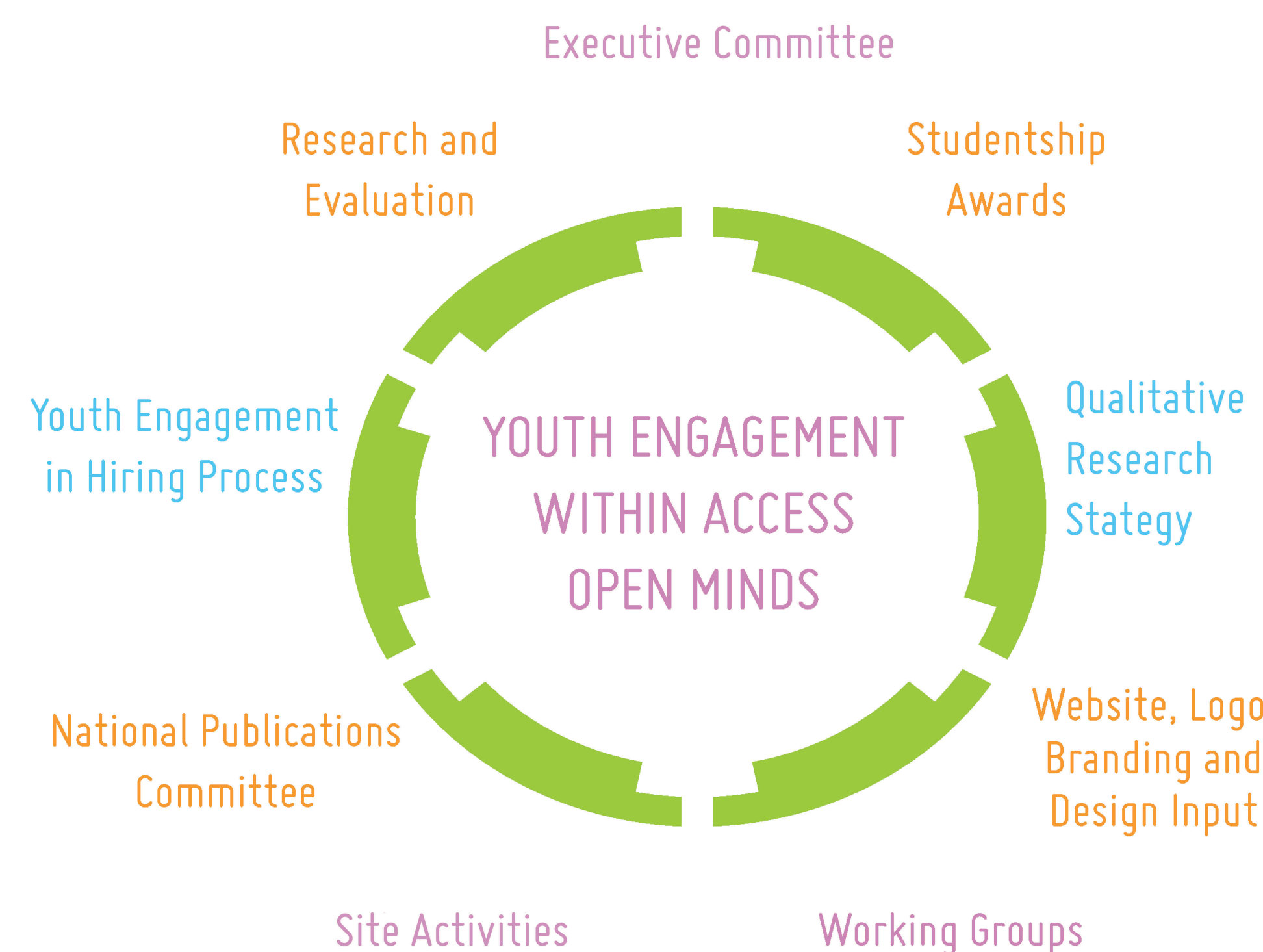
## Our Unique Approach: “We are no longer tokens”

- Strategies to creating a youth council
  - Find a group of dedicated youth who share the same passion to change their future
  - Include youth in every step of the way while maintaining a clear understanding of partnership and potential achievements
  - Create easy and flexible communication strategies
  - Exchange ideas
  - Ask for feedback and remain open and flexible to change
  - Discuss feasibility of feedback and what is implemented



## How are youth engaged?

- Application process is accessible and informal, encouraging diverse youth
- Meeting times and methods fit the needs of youth
- Youth are compensated for their time
- Writing a Terms of Reference as an ongoing document
- Facebook Group for communication
- Co-leads as opposed to one lead
- Building network wide capacity: stakeholders are trained and supported throughout



### Mission

The mission of the ACCESS Open Minds Youth Council is to create a **real culture of change** in youth mental health services by facilitating youth engagement across the ACCESS OM network

## Conclusions and Implications

- Given the diversity at the 14 ACCESS sites, which span six provinces and one territory, including members of Indigenous, homeless, and LGBTQ2S+ communities from a range of cultural and economic backgrounds, these insights are applicable to various settings across the globe.
- When projects forge strong youth partnerships, they will create young leaders with skills to leverage change on a global scale.
- Quote: “I finally have a voice on a project, as opposed to being a token.”

## Acknowledgements

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