



# SCARBOROUGH CLIMATE EQUITY COLLECTIVE

## Engaging Racialized Youth in Scarborough in Municipal Climate Decision-Making

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Scarborough Climate Equity Collective

Youth Challenge International: Innovate MY Future Program



## Overview

As part of Youth Challenge International's Innovate MY Future Program (July 2021 to February 2022), our team, the Scarborough Climate Equity Collective, aimed to answer the following research question: *How can we break down barriers to meaningfully include racialized youth in Scarborough in municipal climate decision-making?*

As Scarborough tends to be overlooked and ignored in many policy discussions and decisions, this report is our final product to the City of Toronto on how to meaningfully engage and mobilize racialized youth in Scarborough within municipal climate decision-making. Based on survey insights and stakeholder interviews, this document outlines the challenges faced by racialized youth in Scarborough when engaging in municipal climate action. We also provide recommendations on how municipal actors can better engage, include and centre the voices of racialized youth living in Scarborough within their projects, programs and policies related to local climate action.

## Methodology

In December 2021, we conducted a survey to obtain a better understanding of the current engagement of racialized youth living in Scarborough within municipal climate action. We define "racialized youth living in Scarborough" as any Black, Indigenous or racialized youth aged 15 to 34 who currently lives or has lived in Scarborough within the last two years. From our understanding, "municipal climate action" refers to actions including but not limited to voting in municipal elections, writing to city councillors, and participating in discussions on climate change with city staff and councillors.

We shared the survey through our social media accounts and personal networks, and also sent it to 40 community and environmental organizations based in the City of Toronto for further dissemination. This survey, which was completed by 16 individuals, allowed us to understand the barriers faced by this group when engaging in municipal climate action, as well as provided ideas on how to better integrate these voices in municipal projects, programs and policies affecting climate action in Scarborough. While this is a small sample size and does not represent the perspectives of all racialized youth in Scarborough, it is an important starting point to obtain insights for our research question.

During our project period, we also conducted interviews with four stakeholders, which included one city councillor representing a riding in Scarborough, two climate activists working for environmental organizations in Toronto, and one academic who researches anti-Black racism and is involved in community organizing. These interviews allowed us to consider our challenge question from multiple perspectives and positions of power. The conversations that arose from these interviews also helped us better understand the interconnected nature of youth climate engagement, especially at the intersection of climate justice, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, geography and socioeconomic status.



## Main Findings

### Survey Insights

Our survey responses demonstrated that racialized youth in Scarborough are interested in engaging in municipal climate action. They acknowledged that cities contribute a significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions and that we must change the way we live in cities. Moreover, they shared that policymakers should address the interconnected issues of transportation, housing, income and food security. Respondents also highlighted how adverse climate conditions affect racialized and historically excluded populations in particular, and equitable policies must be developed to protect these groups from the adverse effects of climate change.

While respondents acknowledged that they were concerned about the climate crisis, many were not engaged in municipal climate action. They stated that they were not sure how to advocate municipally, that they did not have the necessary resources to advocate at the municipal level, and that they were unsure of the effectiveness of municipal climate action. Respondents shared the barriers they faced when engaging in municipal climate action: lack of knowledge on how to connect with municipal decision-makers; lack of time due to employment, education, family and other commitments; feeling that their voice does not matter and that their views are not valued; inability to travel downtown or within the city for municipal discussions; and not hearing back from city councillors and other people to whom they have reached out. Respondents also noted that there was a lack of education on current climate action plans.

### Stakeholder Interview Insights

Through our stakeholder interviews, we uncovered many interconnected issues affecting racialized youth in Scarborough. A recurring theme was alienation and disenfranchisement due to race and ethnicity. Because of the historically and institutionally privileged voice of upper-class white residents, racialized youth often do not feel a sense of representation or belonging within municipal engagement. This is consistent with the survey findings discussed above. One stakeholder discussed that an actionable step would be to uncover ways to support racialized communities in mobilizing themselves in municipal climate action, for instance by becoming better educated in climate change and municipal policy.

Another recurring theme was socioeconomic status. Most of our respondents stated that because racialized youth in Scarborough are more likely to be middle- or low-income, their discretionary time to participate in climate action is limited. Moreover, they are likely to exert less power as voters and constituents than their white, middle-/upper-middle-class counterparts. Finally, geography was another recurring theme. Climate actions in Toronto, such as protests, are often downtown-centric and physically inaccessible to youth living in Scarborough, which serves as both a barrier and a cause of alienation. Scarborough is also chronically underserved in terms of city spending and infrastructure (e.g. transit) and is underrepresented by strong proponents in City Hall.

## Recommendations to Municipal Policymakers

In this section, we will outline the recommendations shared with us by our survey respondents and stakeholders. These are actions that would help racialized youth living in Scarborough to engage in municipal climate decision-making and they outline how municipal policymakers can better understand the needs and concerns of this group.

### I. Engage directly with racialized youth in Scarborough.

City councillors and staff should engage directly with racialized youth in Scarborough to understand their concerns and priorities related to climate change. This can be accomplished through town halls and consultations in different neighbourhoods in Scarborough, as well by visiting places where racialized youth work and play (instead of asking them to travel downtown), engaging with them in public settings (e.g. malls, grocery stores), talking to them directly in classes in high school and universities, and undertaking door-to-door canvassing throughout the year (i.e. beyond election periods). Municipal actors should create and leverage existing local youth advisory groups and committees, as well as partner with existing groups to reach youth directly, such as youth organizations (e.g. Toronto Youth Cabinet), student councils, and post-secondary student organizations. Surveys, newsletters and social media are also important tools of direct engagement.

### II. Ensure accessibility and equity in municipal climate engagement.

When engaging with racialized youth living in Scarborough, it is important for municipal decision-makers to ensure accessibility and equity are at the forefront of such efforts. Most youth are unable to attend events during the day due to education, employment, family and other commitments, and therefore, municipal decision-makers should create opportunities for youth to attend meetings and make deputations in the evenings and weekends, provide transport for those who need it, and develop online engagement and submissions opportunities. The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association has developed two thorough guides on conducting [accessible public engagement](#) and [accessible meetings](#), which municipal decision-makers should refer to when organizing any engagements.

It is fundamentally important that youth voices are not tokenized in municipal climate engagement, as decision-makers should create long-term opportunities for engagement and follow up with individuals consulted on their concerns instead of undertaking one-off consultation processes in which youth are not sure if their concerns and recommendations are heard or taken seriously. As racialized youth in Scarborough are unlikely to be able to afford to take time off to participate in these engagement efforts, municipal actors should also compensate individuals (such as through honoraria) and create paid opportunities for engagement, especially for long-term consultation processes.



### III. Invest in municipal climate education and employment programs.

As individuals are not fully aware of municipal climate priorities and actions, accessible educational materials and resources, educational programs and retreats, trainings, and workshops will improve awareness on community developments and increase knowledge and skills on how to engage at the municipal level on climate action. This includes sharing resources on what climate issues fall under the municipal jurisdiction, providing information on the appropriate channels to share concerns with municipal decision-makers, training programs on climate education and climate advocacy related to municipal climate issues, and mentorship programs with municipal policymakers to ensure youth are continuously engaged and learning about climate priorities in their communities.

Municipal actors should also create paid employment opportunities for youth to get involved in climate action in their communities, especially through summer and part-time employment programs dedicated to local climate issues and priorities. It is also important that these educational and employment opportunities are tailored and targeted according to different and specific age brackets, ethnic groups, and neighbourhoods across Scarborough as appropriate, as Scarborough's racialized youth are not a monolith and their interests and priorities may vary according to their intersectional identities and geographical surroundings.

## Conclusion

Overall, through our survey and stakeholder interviews conducted during this project, it was clear that racialized youth in Scarborough are interested and passionate about engaging in municipal climate action due to their concerns about the accelerating climate crisis. We also know that local climate action is an important pillar of creating a just and sustainable future for all of us. However, a multitude of barriers is hindering the engagement of racialized youth in Scarborough on municipal climate priorities.

We believe that elected city councillors and city staff have a responsibility to ensure that Scarborough's racialized youth—who are too often neglected and excluded from municipal decision-making tables—are meaningfully consulted, engaged and centred in municipal climate projects, programs and policies related to Scarborough. We hope the survey and stakeholder insights and the resulting recommendations outlined above are useful in achieving these objectives. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with the City of Toronto to ensure that Scarborough's racialized youth are not neglected as we navigate the adverse impacts of climate change on historically and systemically excluded groups and communities.