

Break The Divide Regina Roundtable Report on the Draft Implementation Framework for the Right to a Healthy Environment under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999

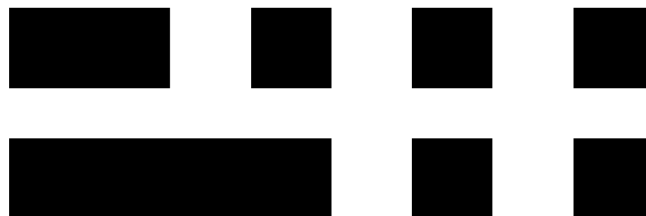
Written as part of the Consultation on the CEPA Right to a
Healthy Environment Draft Implementation Framework



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B R E A K T H E D I V I D E

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About Us

Break The Divide

[Break The Divide](#) (BTD) is a Canadian youth-led non-profit empowering young people to navigate the emotional impacts of climate change by fostering connection, dialogue, and community engagement. BTD's programming equips young people with resources to understand their climate emotions, and connects communities with one another to build resilience and share knowledge amidst the climate crisis.

Break The Divide's patent framework "apathy to empathy to action" seeks to build ways in which young people can connect and learn from one another in an increasingly polarized world, allowing them to build empathy for realities that they have never faced, and empowering them to transform that empathy into concrete actions that advance the creation of harmonious and abundant futures.



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Youth Perspectives on the Right to a Healthy Environment: Regina Roundtable Summary Report

1.0 Executive Summary

This report provides a detailed analysis of insights and recommendations gathered from a youth roundtable discussion in Regina, SK focusing on the Right to a Healthy Environment under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). High school students participated in facilitated group discussions, offering thoughtful perspectives on environmental challenges, community engagement strategies, and policy recommendations. The event demonstrated young people's deep understanding of environmental issues and their desire for meaningful participation in environmental decision-making processes.

2.0 Introduction

BTD reviewed the [Draft Implementation Framework for the Right to a Healthy Environment under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999](#), hereby referred to as “the framework”, and compiled this report based on roundtable discussions with youth from Regina, Saskatchewan. This report was written as part of the public consultation period for the framework and was made possible with funding from [Environment and Climate Change Canada](#) (ECCC) and [Health Canada](#) (HC). In this report, we will refer to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, as “CEPA”. The right to a healthy environment under CEPA will also hereby be referred to as “RTHE”.

3.0 Methods

On December 9, 2024, BTD held a roundtable event for youth in Regina at the Regina Floral Conservatory. A diverse group of 23 students from five different schools attended, with several being accompanied by their teachers (Annex 1). Youth were provided with honoraria to attend to value their lived experience and knowledge.

The event began with a Bingo activity designed for the students to get to know each other (Annex 2). Afterwards, students were introduced to CEPA and RTHE and learned about pollution worldwide and the history of environmental protection. At several points throughout the presentation, students were invited to answer questions on sticky notes to keep them engaged.

After a short break, students were divided into five breakout groups for the first round of discussions. During this first round, students were presented with different case studies and were asked to reflect on the various concepts laid out in the framework. A facilitator was present in each group to help guide conversations and take notes about what was discussed. A representative from each group was then invited to present their findings to the main group.

Once every group had shared, everyone took a break to have dinner. At this time, several students and facilitators were interviewed about their experiences so far. After dinner, students returned to their breakout groups to answer Regina-specific questions and have open-ended discussions about local environmental issues in Regina. The event ended with each group sharing key insights from their discussions and reflecting on the day.



Event Structure and Facilitation

Format and Organization

The roundtable employed a carefully structured format that proved effective:

- Initial collective session followed by focused breakout groups
- Consistent group membership throughout the event to build comfort and rapport
- Interactive elements encouraging movement and engagement
- Case study discussions on specific environmental challenges
- Facilitated dialogue sessions with expert facilitators

Facilitator Observations and Recommendations

The facilitators provided valuable insights on the event's execution:

- Students required initial context and warm-up time to fully engage with complex topics
- The physical space constraints (particularly post-COVID considerations) affected participant comfort
- Additional preparation time for facilitators would enhance future sessions
- Expanding event size could benefit more students, given adequate resources
- The agriculture case study was particularly effective in generating discussion

Strengths of the Format

Several aspects of the event structure were particularly successful:

- Voluntary participation ensured engaged attendees
- Near peer interaction fostered open dialogue
- Creation of a supportive community environment
- Opportunity for students to voice concerns directly
- Balance between structured discussion and flexible conversation



4.0 Results

4.1 Local Environmental Concerns

Air Quality and Urban Environment

Regina's youth have identified several critical environmental challenges affecting their daily lives and community wellbeing. The most pressing concern centers around air quality, particularly in the downtown core where vehicle emissions have created persistent pollution problems. Students emphasized that the city's heavy reliance on personal vehicles, combined with insufficient public transit options, has contributed significantly to poor air quality throughout the urban area.

The refinery district emerged as a particular point of concern during discussions. Students described a visible degradation of the environment surrounding the refinery, characterized by persistent smog and a notable absence of vegetation. The impact extends beyond environmental damage, as residents actively avoid the area due to air quality concerns. One student described the area as having a "general grossness," noting that "nothing grows around there." This avoidance behavior has created what students referred to as a dead zone within their city, highlighting the intersection between industrial activity and community wellbeing.

Seasonal challenges compound these ongoing air quality issues. The increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires in recent years has led to periods of severely compromised air quality throughout Regina. Students expressed particular concern about the combined impact of industrial emissions and wildfire smoke, noting that these concurrent issues create especially dangerous conditions for vulnerable populations.



Transportation Infrastructure

The roundtable discussions revealed deep frustration with Regina's current transportation system. Students identified a clear connection between the city's car-centric infrastructure and its environmental challenges. The lack of reliable and accessible public transit options forces many residents to rely on personal vehicles, creating a cycle of increased emissions and decreased air quality.

Students advocated strongly for the implementation of free transit access for youth, arguing that this would not only reduce environmental impact but also promote greater mobility and independence for young people. They emphasized that current transit options are both insufficient in coverage and prohibitively expensive for many youth, effectively forcing car dependency from an early age.

Industrial Impact and Economic Tensions

The relationship between Regina's industrial sector and environmental health emerged as a complex and contentious issue. Students demonstrated sophisticated understanding of the economic importance of industries like the refinery while expressing serious concerns about their environmental impact. They particularly noted the tension between the province's reliance on oil and gas revenue and the need for environmental protection.

Students criticized what they perceived as preferential treatment of industrial polluters, specifically mentioning frequent "bailouts" for oil and gas companies despite their environmental record. They expressed frustration with the provincial government's tendency to prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term environmental sustainability.

Water and Soil Quality

Beyond air quality concerns, students raised significant issues regarding water and soil contamination in the region. They specifically discussed the impact of industrial runoff on local waterways and expressed concern about the long-term effects of chemical contamination on soil health. Students emphasized the interconnected nature of these environmental challenges, noting how water and soil contamination affects everything from local agriculture to community health.



Waste Management Challenges

The roundtable revealed significant concerns about Regina's waste management practices. Students questioned current landfill operations and expansion plans, raising specific concerns about:

- The handling of hazardous materials and chemical waste
- The impact of waste facilities on surrounding land and water systems
- The efficiency of current recycling and composting programs
- The need for better waste reduction initiatives

Health Impacts

Students demonstrated a clear understanding of the connection between environmental conditions and public health. They discussed both immediate and long-term health impacts of environmental degradation, including:

- Respiratory issues related to poor air quality
- Mental health challenges stemming from environmental anxiety
- Physical health impacts of contaminated soil and water
- Generational health effects of environmental pollution

Community Planning and Development

The youth participants expressed concern about Regina's urban planning approaches and their environmental implications. They noted that current development patterns often prioritize car-dependent suburban expansion over sustainable urban design. Through ongoing engagement, students advocated for more thoughtful community planning that would:

- Promote walkable neighborhoods and accessible community spaces
- Incorporate green spaces and urban forestry
- Support local food production and community gardens, building on opportunities for increased food sovereignty and engagement with Indigenous knowledges
- Encourage sustainable transportation options, including but not limited to electrifying the bus fleet in Regina



4.2 Detailed Recommendations

Youth Engagement in Decision-Making

The roundtable participants emphasized that meaningful youth involvement in environmental decision-making requires fundamental changes to current consultation processes. They articulated a vision where young people are not merely consulted as an afterthought, but are integral to the entire decision-making process from conception through implementation.

Students proposed a multi-tiered approach to youth engagement. At the foundational level, they recommended the creation of permanent youth advisory committees within municipal and provincial environmental departments. These committees would not serve merely as symbolic gestures of inclusion, but would hold real decision-making power and direct access to policy makers. The youth emphasized that these positions should be paid roles, recognizing that young people's time and expertise are valuable resources.

Beyond formal committee structures, students advocated for a more comprehensive integration of youth perspectives in environmental assessment processes. They proposed that any major environmental project or policy should require a specific youth impact assessment, examining both immediate and long-term consequences for future generations. This assessment would need to be conducted with significant input from diverse youth populations, ensuring representation across different socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural communities, and geographic areas within Regina.

The participants also stressed the importance of creating youth-specific spaces within broader community consultations. They noted that traditional public consultation formats often inadvertently silence youth voices, as young people may feel intimidated or overshadowed in rooms dominated by adults. To address this, they recommended establishing dedicated youth consultation sessions, facilitated by young people themselves, running parallel to broader community consultations.

Digital Engagement and Communication Strategies

The youth participants outlined a vision for digital engagement that goes far beyond traditional government websites. They emphasized the need for dynamic, interactive platforms that reflect how young people actually consume and share information. Rather than static information repositories, they envisioned digital spaces that facilitate ongoing dialogue and active participation.

The proposed digital platform would integrate several key features designed to maximize youth engagement. At its core would be a user-friendly interface that prioritizes accessibility and immediate access to relevant information. Students emphasized that environmental data should be presented in clear, visually appealing formats, using infographics, interactive maps, and real-time monitoring displays to make complex information more digestible.

Social media integration emerged as a crucial component of the digital strategy. Students stressed that environmental communications need to meet young people where they are, utilizing platforms like Instagram and TikTok not just for information dissemination, but for genuine two-way dialogue. They suggested that government agencies should employ young content creators to develop authentic, relevant content that resonates with youth audiences.

Environmental Education and Support Systems

The roundtable participants articulated a vision for environmental education that extends far beyond traditional classroom instruction. They advocated for an integrated approach that combines formal education with experiential learning and emotional support.

The proposed educational framework would begin with mandatory environmental education integrated throughout the school curriculum, not just in science classes but across all subjects. This would include practical skills like waste management and sustainable living practices, as well as deeper exploration of environmental justice issues and climate science. Students emphasized the importance of hands-on learning opportunities, suggesting regular field trips to both affected environmental sites and successful sustainability initiatives.

A particularly innovative recommendation was the establishment of "climate emotion circles" - structured support groups where young people could process their feelings about environmental challenges in a supportive, action-oriented environment. These groups would combine emotional support with practical action planning, helping participants channel their environmental anxiety into constructive community engagement.

Community Consultation and Decision-Making

Students outlined a comprehensive approach to community consultation that would fundamentally reshape how environmental decisions are made in Regina. They emphasized that consultation should begin at the earliest stages of project planning and continue throughout implementation and monitoring phases.

The proposed consultation framework would require mandatory community participation at multiple stages of any significant environmental project. This would include initial surveys and workshops, regular community meetings, and ongoing feedback mechanisms. Importantly, students stressed that these consultations must be genuine dialogues with real potential to influence outcomes, not merely pro forma exercises in public relations.

To ensure accessibility, students recommended that all community meetings should be offered in multiple formats - in-person, online, and hybrid - with recordings and summaries made available for those unable to attend. They also emphasized the importance of providing consultation materials in multiple languages and formats to ensure all community members can participate meaningfully.

Long-term Sustainability Planning

The youth participants demonstrated sophisticated understanding of the need for long-term planning approaches that consider impacts far into the future. They repeatedly referenced the Indigenous principle of seven-generation planning, suggesting that all environmental decisions should consider impacts at least seven generations into the future.

Students recommended the development of comprehensive environmental modeling systems that would help predict long-term impacts of current decisions. They emphasized that these models should consider not just environmental factors, but also social, health, and economic impacts on future generations. They stressed the importance of applying the precautionary principle in environmental decision-making, arguing that when facing uncertainty, the most environmentally protective option should be chosen.

4.3 Implementation Strategy

Immediate Actions and Early Priorities

The youth participants emphasized that the momentum generated by the roundtable must be maintained through immediate, concrete actions. A key priority identified was the establishment of regular climate discussion circles in partnership with the Regina Public Library. These circles would serve multiple purposes: providing a consistent space for ongoing environmental dialogue, building community among environmentally engaged youth, and maintaining pressure on decision-makers to act on the roundtable's recommendations.

The proposed climate discussion circles would be hosted in accessible community spaces, such as the Regina Floral Conservatory, creating welcoming environments that combine natural settings with productive dialogue. Students emphasized that these meetings should not be mere discussion groups, but action-oriented sessions that produce concrete outcomes and maintain accountability for environmental commitments.

Education emerged as another crucial area for immediate action. Students proposed developing a comprehensive environmental workshop series for Regina schools, carefully aligned with existing curriculum requirements to facilitate adoption. These workshops would need to demonstrate clear connections to educational outcomes while maintaining their environmental focus, making them attractive to both teachers and administrators. The participants stressed that these workshops should be developed and delivered in partnership with youth, creating opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and leadership development.

Establishing Feedback Mechanisms

A sophisticated system of feedback mechanisms was proposed to ensure continuous improvement and accountability. Rather than relying on traditional suggestion boxes or annual surveys, students envisioned an integrated feedback system that would combine regular

community check-ins, online feedback platforms, and youth-led monitoring committees. This system would track progress on environmental initiatives, identify emerging challenges, and ensure that community voices remain central to environmental decision-making.

The participants emphasized that feedback mechanisms must be genuinely responsive, with clear processes for incorporating community input into decision-making. They suggested creating a public dashboard that would track the implementation of environmental initiatives, showing both progress and setbacks in real time. This transparency would help maintain trust and demonstrate genuine commitment to community-led environmental action.

4.4 Long-term Objectives and Sustainability

The youth participants demonstrated remarkable clarity about their long-term vision for Regina's environmental future. They emphasized that while immediate actions are crucial, these must be guided by comprehensive long-term objectives that promote genuine sustainability and environmental justice.

A key aspect of this long-term vision is the transformation of Regina's industrial base toward more sustainable practices. Students recognized that this transformation cannot happen overnight but insisted that clear pathways toward sustainability must be established and followed. They emphasized the need for regular reassessment of progress and adjustment of strategies as new environmental challenges and opportunities emerge.

The participants also stressed the importance of building long-term community capacity for environmental stewardship. This includes developing new leadership within the environmental movement, particularly among young people, and ensuring that environmental knowledge and commitment are passed between generations. They emphasized that environmental protection must become embedded in Regina's community culture, not just its policies and regulations.

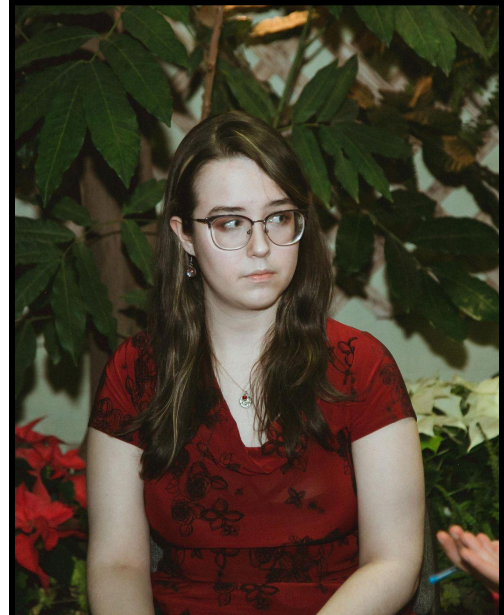
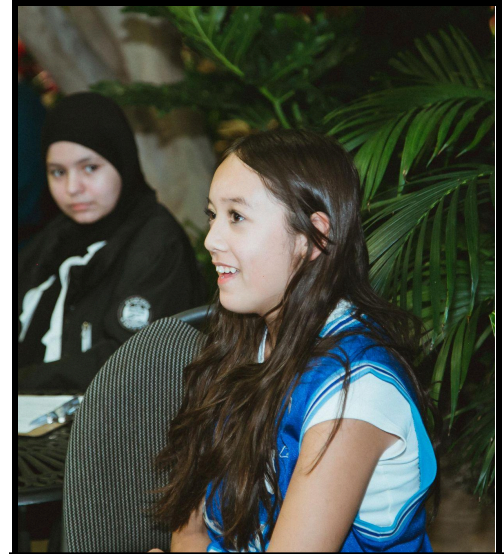
5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Summary

The Regina youth roundtable demonstrated conclusively that young people possess both the capability and the commitment to contribute meaningfully to environmental decision-making. The sophistication of their analysis and the practicality of their recommendations challenge any notion that youth perspectives might be peripheral to environmental policy discussions.

The recommendations emerging from this roundtable offer a comprehensive framework for advancing environmental protection in Regina. From immediate actions to long-term strategic objectives, the participants have outlined a clear path forward that balances ambition with practicality, and urgency with strategic thinking.

Perhaps most importantly, the roundtable highlighted the crucial importance of intergenerational dialogue and youth leadership in addressing environmental challenges. The participants demonstrated that young people bring unique perspectives and valuable insights to environmental discussions, informed by both their immediate experiences of environmental challenges and their stake in long-term environmental outcomes.



5.2 Next Steps

To maintain momentum and ensure concrete outcomes from the roundtable, several immediate next steps are recommended:

1. Formation of a youth-led implementation committee to oversee the execution of roundtable recommendations.
2. Development of detailed timelines and resource requirements for priority initiatives.
3. Establishment of the proposed climate discussion circles within the next three months.
4. Creation of a public progress tracking system to maintain accountability.
5. Initiation of discussions with school administrators about environmental workshop integration.
6. Development of the proposed digital engagement platform.

The success of these next steps will require ongoing commitment from both institutional partners and community members. However, the energy and insight demonstrated during the roundtable suggest that Regina's youth are more than ready to lead this crucial work.

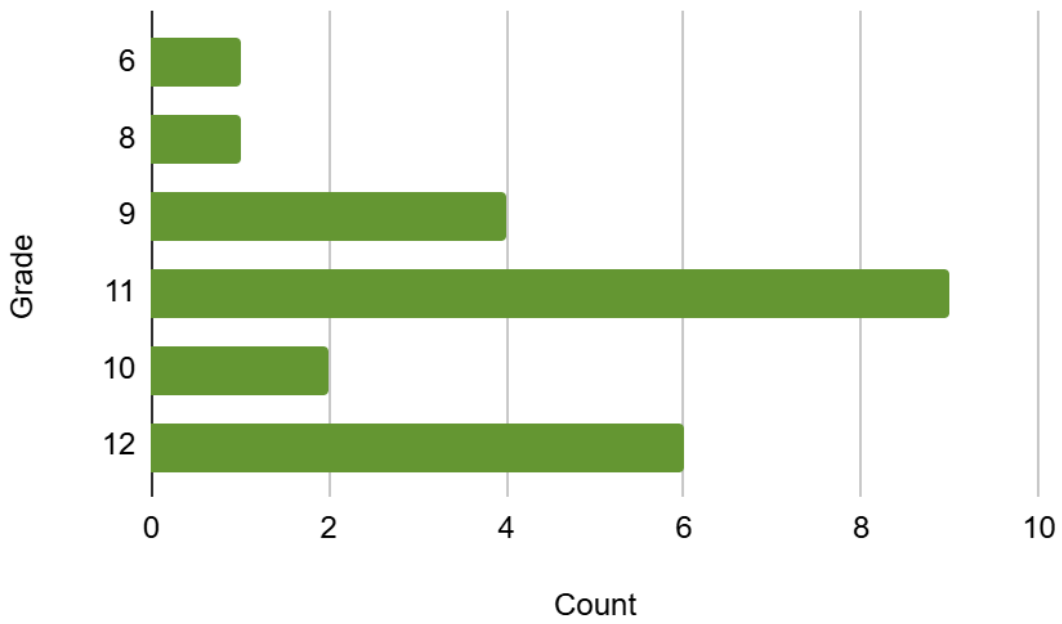
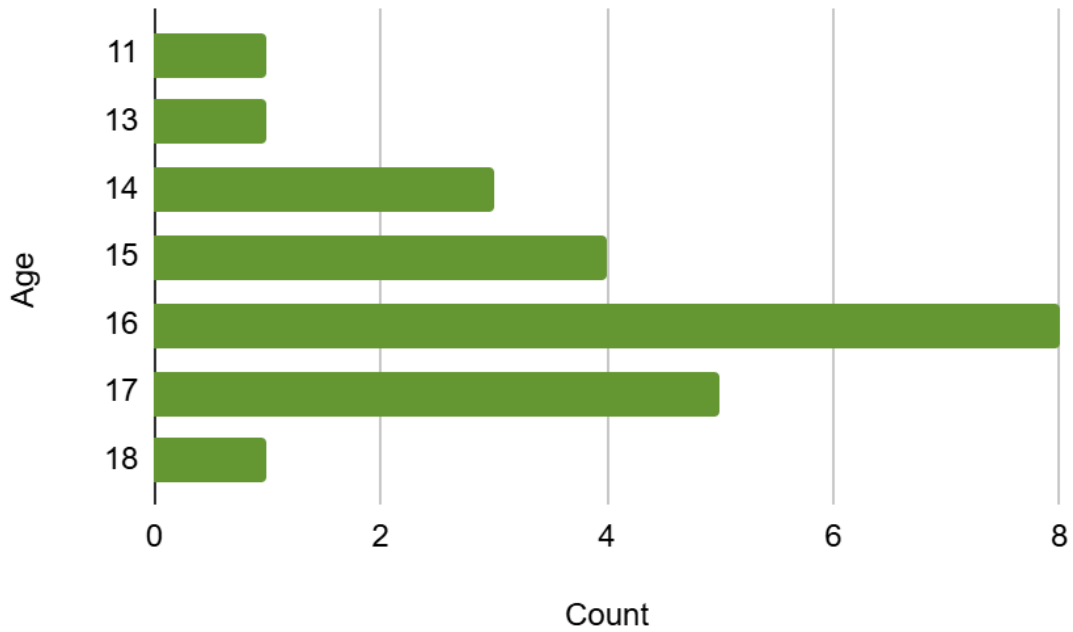


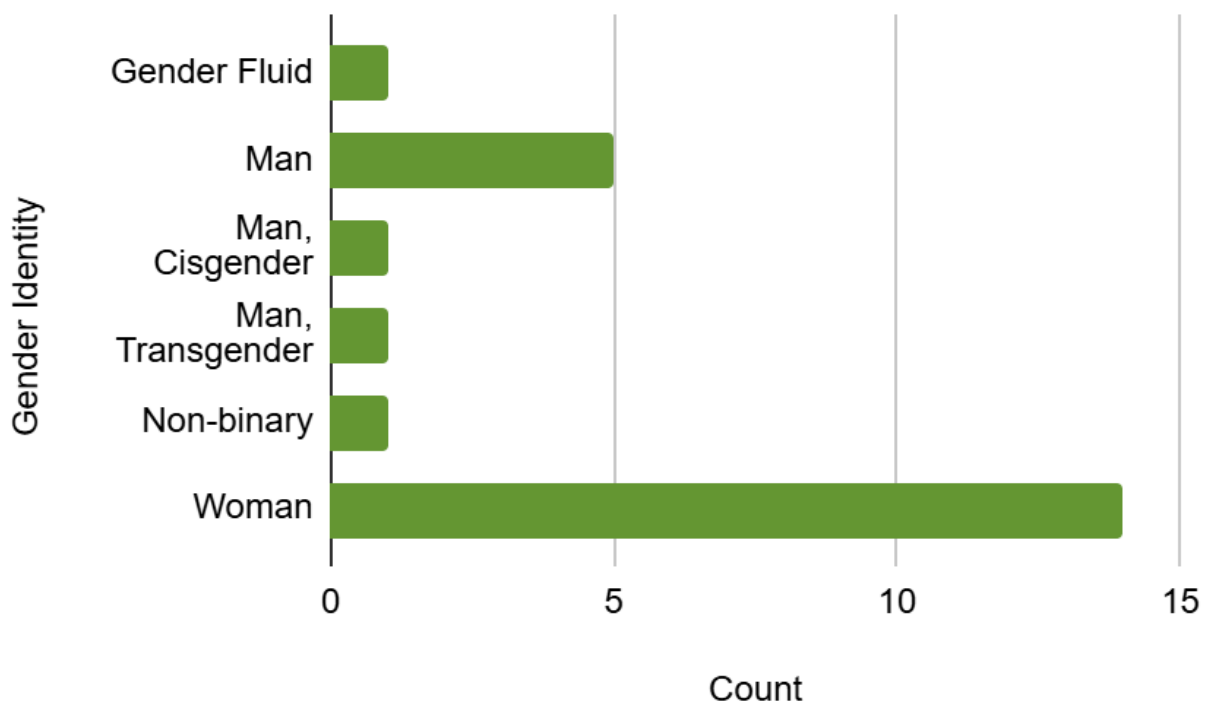
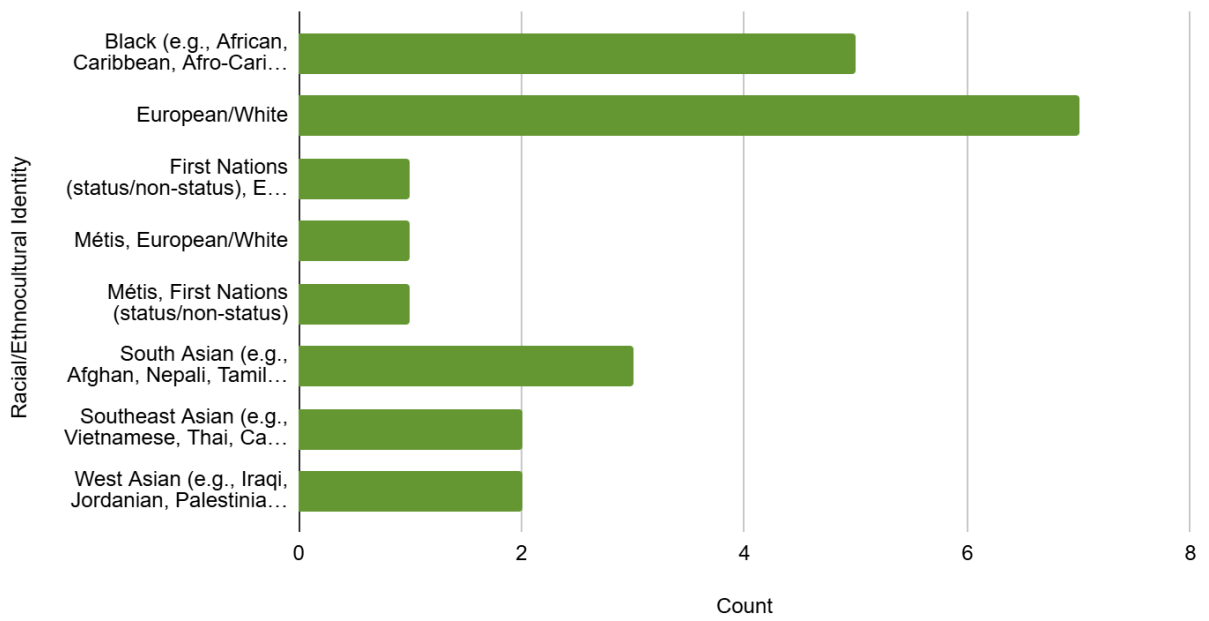
Glossary

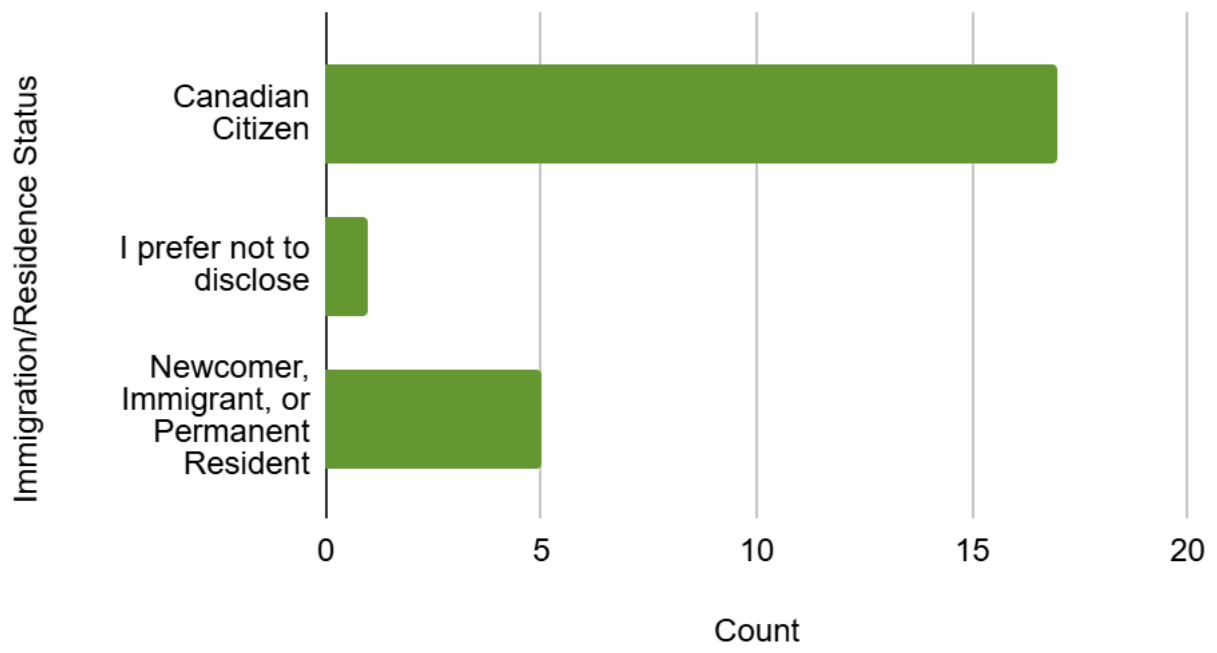
AMP	Administrative Monetary Penalty
BTD	Break The Divide
CEPA	Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999
ECCC	Environment and Climate Change Canada
HC	Health Canada
NPRI	National Pollutant Release Inventory
the framework	The Draft Implementation Framework for the Right to a Healthy Environment under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999
the right	The right to a healthy environment under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999

Annexes:

Appendix 1: Participant Demographics







Appendix 2: Bingo Card

Right to a Healthy Environment Roundtable BINGO

Has visited Wascana Lake	Can name 3 local parks in Regina	Knows what CEPA stands for	Has attended a Regina Pats game	Loves poutine
Is passionate about climate action	Can name one local environmental issue	Is a student at Campbell	Has a favourite hiking spot	Knows how to play an instrument
Has planted a tree	Knows how to say "hello" in another language	FREE BINGO SQUARE	Is a student at Miller	Is a student at Thom
Loves pineapple on pizza	Has a pet	Has been to the Saskatchewan Science Centre	Knows a good joke	Enjoys camping
Walks or bikes to school regularly	Prefers winter over summer	Was born outside Saskatchewan	Has a sibling	Can name an environmental activist