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Cities that act attract young people

FUSION HALIFAX

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YOUNG PEOPLE are notoriously difficult to reach.

All over North America, communities are struggling to engage younger generations. This effort is complicated by the fact that 20- to 40-year-olds are living in a Web 2.0 world using media and technology differently and forever transforming the way we communicate.

Companies are reaching. It is increasingly a challenge to find and keep young talent. Not only do younger people communicate differently, we're of the mantra "Live first, work second," and this represents a clear cultural shift for the workplace.

Cities are reaching. Richard Florida's book *Who's Your City?* further articulates the challenge and defines characteristics of regions that are defying the trends. The truth is that cities that are acting are attracting. To attract and retain the best and brightest of generations X and Y, leaders must begin listening to what young residents have to say and must make tangible and sincere efforts to understand what we want for our future.

Perhaps the most difficult part of this reality check is that leaders have to create a community that reflects this voice.

This is a lot to strive for in such a competitive climate, but not impossible to achieve. In fact, it can't be.

You don't have to look far beyond the statistics to realize that a proactive and collaborative strategy by all partners is absolutely imperative for the future success and growth of our region. Between 1996 and 2001, metro Halifax gained more than 5,500 members of the 18-to-34 demographic. Between 2001 and 2006 we only gained 1,300 — a staggering 74 per cent drop from one census period to the next. If this is not a wake-up call; we're not sure what is.

Last month, FUSION Halifax reached out to our municipal government. It met with almost all members of council. The board was invigorated by this meeting because it was clear that our municipal government is interested in making a seat at the table for the next generation.

The following week, FUSION made a presentation to our provincial deputy ministers, and the response was equally positive. Our senior government officials understand that future progress and economic growth rests on our ability to build a community that is creative, engaging and innovative. They get that the next generation has global choices and that we need to become a world-class destination of choice or be left behind.

This is great news for our community. We have a demographic that is eager to be engaged and our governments and businesses understand that young people must be involved in leadership opportunities, community capacity building and a plan for the future. This sounds to us like the perfect foundation to take tangible action.

Over the coming months, FUSION will continue to participate in the community we call home. Our members choose to be active citizens, rather than simply residents. We know what we want our city to look like and we aren't afraid to roll up our sleeves and build it. We are already working actively with our municipal government.

Our sustainability team has been consulting with Harm's transportation services, and our urban development team has been actively engaged in HRM by Design. We will have a forum exclusive to our members on the proposed tax reforms. Our people-factor action team is about to embark on a project with Harm's human resources team, which will help them in their recruitment and retention efforts.

FUSION will then be sharing this information and best practices with local employers, working to ensure that our local business community is one of the most labour-competitive in Canada.

And these are just some of the highlights of how a "hard-to-reach" demographic can really make a difference if the larger community is ready to embrace us.

With our size and easy access to partners, there is nothing standing in the way of this province and city trail-blazing on this front. We have all the tools at our fingertips to create an innovative, dynamic and signature destination for global talent. Five years from now we can be the envy of regions around the world who could be asking: What is their secret?

So what are we waiting for? The time is now.

FUSION Halifax is a professional organization representing the voice of the 20- to 40-year-old demographic. Launched just eight months ago, it has nearly 1,000 registered members. For more information visit www.fusionhalifax.ca

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