



Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion  
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

# Gen Z – A generation to look up to

An executive summary

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## Introduction

- » Read the full report [Gen Z: A Generation to Look Up To](#) written by Giselle Kovary and Robert Pearson from n-gen People Performance Inc.

Through our webinars and now this executive summary, CCDI has mobilized n-gen's latest research and training to support employers in fostering generational inclusion in the workplace. We know that as generational differences impact workforce dynamics and leadership decisions, generational inclusion often remains to be a top of mind concern for many employers. The findings highlighted in this executive summary have several implications for employers, especially in areas pertaining to recruitment, hiring, retention and talent management.

Little is known about Gen Z: what they value, what motivates them and what they expect of employers. This study is the first in Canada to explore this generation's experiences and expectations in the Canadian context. This report is based on survey findings collected from 600 Gen Zs across Canada.<sup>1</sup> The data tells us this: Gen Zs are realistically optimistic, they understand the impact of their decisions, they will make choices that serve their needs, while still contributing to the greater good. This will be a generation that will make a difference.

### Profile: Who is gen z?

- » Born 1996-2012
- » 6,795,231 people or 19 per cent of Canada's population (StatsCan 2016 Census)

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<sup>1</sup> These respondents represent all provinces and both official languages. An equal number of men and women completed the survey and 1 per cent represented all other genders.



## Gen Z's expectations and experiences

Realistic optimism is a key characteristic of Gen Z – 59 per cent believe they will be financially better off than their parents and in general, they feel positive about the opportunities they have and feel like they have better opportunities than previous generations. At the same time, they **want to build a future that aligns with their values, not necessarily with what others think they ought to do.** This is a 'do-it-yourself' generation who will forge their own paths and challenge existing norms.

We also know that despite the rapid growth of the gig economy, **Gen Zs are seeking more traditional goals** such as secure employment, long term loyalty, a house, a car, and money for retirement. They define themselves as savers. In fact, saving for the future was rated as the most important criteria for future success. Moreover, 57 per cent plan to start saving for their retirement by the time they are 25 years old, although they may encounter factors such as student debt and underemployment which will likely inhibit them from reaching their saving goals as quickly as they wish.<sup>2</sup> Overall, this generation holds a **mature understanding of their financial futures** and generally take a practical, conservative approach to spending.

Despite their pragmatism, Gen Z will continue the Millennial trend of demanding life to be balanced enough to enjoy the things they want to do now, without having to postpone their enjoyment years later in the future. In other words, **they will prioritize fun over sacrifice.** Their top three priorities are: enjoying life, finding a great job and becoming a better person. However, life is not all rosy for Gen Z. This is a **generation that experiences high levels of stress.** They face issues such as bullying while also being exposed to unique social pressures that partially come from pervasive social media use. Post-secondary education students, who represent older Gen Zs, report high levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

**The proliferation of technology and the digital economy is the most important life-defining event for Gen Z.** How Gen Zs engage with each other and foster relationships is heavily influenced by technology. Gen Zs speak openly about the need to protect their information and be safe online, while also being selective on who sees what they post on social media. It is also important to note that just because this generation is digitally savvy, doesn't mean they don't want face time.

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<sup>2</sup> BMO Wealth Management, "The Personal Balance Sheet: Insights into financial priorities on the roadmap of life." Report. Canadian Edition, July 2016



## Gen Z's expectations of work and attitudes towards education & learning

Gen Zs are eager to build careers that are fulfilling and that they can invest in for many years. They also care about loyalty; **Gen Zs want employers to commit to them and in return, they will do the same.** This is a big shift which will have a profound impact on recruitment and retention efforts of employers. They hold a realistic view of what is required to be successful. They identify the top three factors needed to progress in their careers as: 1) ability to adapt to change 2) being a great team member and 3) being innovative and solving problems. Gen Zs are also aware of technology's future impact on the labour market. The data suggest this generation is insightful about their need to adapt and may be more resilient to market changes as a result.

In terms of employer expectations, Gen Zs want a great leader and they want to work for an organization they respect. Notably, **they value what a company stands for more so than what the products or services they sell.** 63 per cent want to work for a company that is a leader in its field. They will not sacrifice engagement and growth for money. Gen Zs want to work in an environment that embraces their diversity, an environment where you can be your 'true self' and 'best self' at work. **An organization's level of diversity impacts Gen Z's desire and willingness to work there;** however, how this cohort defines diversity is more dubious. **They do not want to be defined or labeled by limiting terms or concepts of diversity.** We can expect this generation to push diversity and inclusion through collectivist actions as opposed to segmented strategies (e.g. affinity groups).

**Gen Z define themselves as life-long learners.** This means they are eager to invest time and energy to learn new things that will help them achieve their career goals. At the same time, they value education and knowledge in a broader context – 71 per cent believe that education is much more important for developing critical thinking skills than for just qualifying for a job.

As evident from this summary, this research has several implications for a wide range of audiences, including employers, recruiters, leaders, educators, colleges and universities and learning and development professionals. Read n-gen's full white paper [here](#) to learn more.

## Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI)

CCDI has a mission to help the organizations we work with be inclusive, free of prejudice and discrimination – and to generate the awareness, dialogue and action for people to recognize diversity as an asset and not an obstacle. Through the research, reports and toolkits we develop and our workshops, events and workplace consultations, we're helping Canadian employers understand their diversity, plan for it and create inclusion.

CCDI's leadership has a proven model that's cultivated trust as an impartial third party. Our expertise is focused on the topics of inclusion that are relevant in Canada now and the regional differences that shape diversity.

A charitable organization that thinks like a business, we have created a niche with our innovative research technology and data analysis that brings a deeper understanding of Canadian diversity demographics and mindsets at any given moment.

CCDI is grateful for the support of our over 140 Employer Partners across Canada.

## Contact us

For any questions regarding the benefits of becoming a CCDI Employer Partner, please contact:

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CCDI is grateful for the ongoing support of our Founding Partners.



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