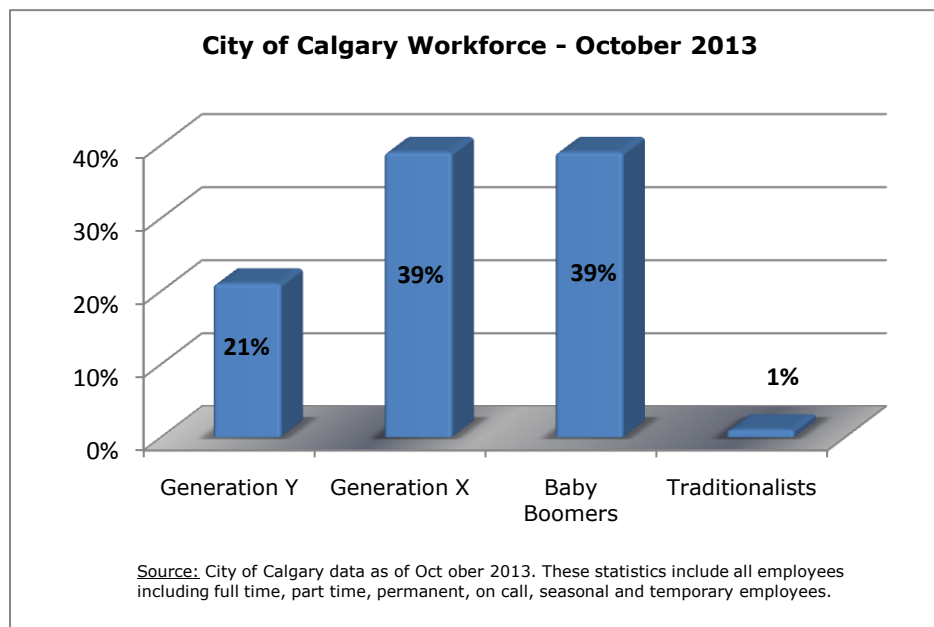


# WE ARE ALL AGES

At the City of Calgary, we are proud to have a diverse workforce. Examples across the age spectrum include a 16-year old concession attendant, a post-secondary summer student, a mid-career manager, and a worker nearing retirement.

Why is this important in our workplace today? It is because we see the opportunities and challenges of having all of the generations working together. In order to continue providing excellent service to citizens, we need to be able to recognize, accept and leverage differences between the generations. Different experiences, work styles and skills can create an incredible opportunity for innovation and the development of new perspectives and ideas. Unfortunately, these differences can also lead to misunderstandings and frustration between co-workers that can result in conflict and reduced opportunities for learning, improvement, innovation, succession planning, and the transfer of knowledge. So here is some information that can help reduce misunderstandings and help us all work together more effectively.

## Four Generations at Work



The City of Calgary currently has a workforce of over 15,000 employees, comprised of four generations at work: 21% Generation Y (also known as Millennials), 39% Generation X, 39% Baby Boomers, and 1% Traditionalists.

Each generation can be defined based on the year in which individuals were born, and on some common historical and cultural events that have shaped that generation. Those experiences play a role in how each generation is typically viewed in society.

The following section provides some common perceptions about each generation. It is meant as a resource to get us started on understanding each generation's unique characteristics.

Please read the generational characteristics with the following words of caution:

- The trends and characteristics presented below are more reflective of generations that have lived in Western societies and are therefore not applicable to all cultures.
- The descriptions may not represent all aspects of one generation.
- It is normal for individuals reading the characteristics to identify with more than one generation. The relevance of each generation on each person depends on his or her personal circumstances such as upbringing, family responsibilities and other life experiences. Employees' own career stage can also shape their expectations and behaviours in the workplace.



**Traditionalists:** born up to 1945

This generation of employees is considered to be loyal and values logic and discipline. They generally prefer a top-down approach and are somewhat resistant to change. For these employees, they strive to build a legacy during their career. They believe in living within their means with major influences from the Great Depression and World Wars I and II.

Some words that characterize them:

- Competent
- Confident
- Conservative
- Dedicated
- Ethical
- Linear work style
- Loyal to organization (duty, honour, country)
- Patriotic
- Willing to sacrifice
- Strong work ethic
- Task oriented
- Trust hierarchy and authority

**Baby Boomers:** born between 1946 – 1964

This generation of employees is optimistic and competitive, values titles, recognition and status. They believe that hard work, ambition and drive will bring success both financially and personally. They have the highest divorce rate of the four generations. For these employees, their careers are always advancing as they strive for the next big thing as a marker of their success. Their major influences were the Vietnam War, T.V., human rights movements and the sexual revolution of the 1960's.

Some words that characterize them:

- Ambitious
- Challenge authority & establishment
- Competent & competitive
- Leadership based on consensus
- Consumerist
- Ethical
- Good communication skills
- Idealist
- Live to work
- Loyal to careers and employers
- Optimistic
- Political correctness
- Strong work ethic
- Want to make a difference
- Willing to take on responsibility

**Generation X:** born between 1965 – 1980

Gen X'ers can be classified as skeptical and they rarely take things at face value. They grew up in a world where typically both parents worked so they have had to become self-reliant and resourceful. Highly tech savvy, this generation is adaptable to change, and values work/life balance. They are influenced by a high divorce rate. Along with the integration of computers and video games into everyday life, this generation is fast-paced and eclectic.

Some words that characterize them:

- Crave independence
- Confident
- Ethical
- Flexible
- Focus on results
- Life balance
- Loyal to manager
- Pampered by their parents
- Pragmatic
- Results driven
- Self sufficient
- Skeptical of institutions
- Strong sense of entitlement
- Unimpressed with authority
- Willing to take on responsibility
- Work to live

**Generation Y/ Millennials:** born between 1981 – 2000

Their nickname is Generation Now. They have grown up in a world of consumerism, war and violence. They are effective, innovative workers with a highly creative side and do well with fast-paced environments. They will challenge authority and the status quo. They are ambitious and tenacious, wanting more training and education to enhance their skills and move ahead. They also want to find meaning and feel like what they are doing matters on a global scale.

Some words that characterize them:

- Ambitious but not entirely focused
- At ease in teams
- Attached to their gadgets & parents
- Confident-can be seen as arrogant
- Have not lived without computers
- Eager to spend money
- Have a more global way of thinking
- Incorporate individual responsibilities into their jobs
- Invited as children to play a role in family's decisions
- Sociable -they make workplace friends
- "Me First " attitude in work life
- Most doted upon of any generation at work
- Open to new ideas & optimistic
- Respect given for competency not title
- Strong sense of entitlement

**Cuspers:** These are employees wedged between two definable generations, born at either the beginning or the end of a generation. These employees find it easy to identify with aspects of both generations while sometimes feeling like they don't belong to either.

## Tips for Inclusive Behaviours

Having a general understanding of the different generations can help us to work more effectively together. We sometimes hear younger generations complain that older co-workers “don’t want to try something different” or the older generations saying that the younger workers don’t believe in “waiting their turn” for promotions or advancement opportunities. We also see individuals from different generations working well together. So how do we do that? Here are some tips to keep in mind when interacting with other generations:

- Recognize that every employee has the same basic values: we all wish to feel included in decisions that affect us, we wish to be respected, to be treated fairly, to trust people we work with, to receive meaningful and relevant feedback, and to learn and contribute to our work environment in a positive way.
- Ask employees directly how they wish to be included, how they wish to learn, contribute and be recognized. Avoid making assumptions based on how young or old someone looks.
- Have clearly defined expectations for the work to be done, but be flexible as to how the work gets done. Ask employees how they intend on accomplishing their job and listen to their ideas. If an employee asks for an unusual request, keep an open mind and determine whether you have a role to play to meet the request.
- Create a culture of mutual responsibility for communicating and dealing with career and life expectations and situations.
- Provide two-way mentorship opportunities between generations to encourage mutual learning.

|                     | <b>Tips for working with each generation:</b>  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Generation Y</b> | <p>Provide a structured, supportive work environment.</p> <p>Listen to employees’ expectations and ideas at work. Be innovative in how to involve and support them, including their work styles and their use of technology and social media. Incorporate ways of working that are more engaging for younger workers and provides them with a respectful platform to voice their opinions.</p> <p>Coach employees to match their multiple and evolving career goals to the formal and informal opportunities that exist, whether they are through job assignments, working on new projects that develop new competencies, or volunteering in the workplace. Help them to grow, feel empowered, and reach their full potential.</p> |
| <b>Generation X</b> | <p>Support a casual, open and flexible work environment.</p> <p>Foster opportunities for growth and personal contribution while recognizing the work-life balance needs of this generation.</p> <p>Develop opportunities for continuous learning and intellectual challenges.</p>  |
| <b>Baby Boomers</b> | <p>Acknowledge employees’ hard work, independence and resilience. Be respectful of their viewpoints and the wisdom they have gained over the years.</p> <p>Leverage employees’ loyalty to the organization, their families and communities.</p> <p>Don’t assume that age limits their abilities. Many baby boomers are independent, confident and resourceful.</p> <p>Provide flexible work options in order to keep older workers engaged and contributing for as long as possible.</p> <p>Promote the sharing of ideas, experiences and transfer of knowledge between baby boomers and other workers to support the retention of corporate knowledge.</p>  |

## More information?

### External resources:

Generations in Canada, Statistics Canada (2011)

[http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-311-x/98-311-x2011003\\_2-eng.cfm](http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-311-x/98-311-x2011003_2-eng.cfm)

The Myth of Generational Differences in the Workplace (11/20/2007):

<http://www.amanet.org/training/articles/The-Myth-of-Generational-Differences-in-the-Workplace.aspx>

Bridging the Generation Gap, Scott H. Span (8/17/2012)

<http://goo.gl/nCzqL>

Gen Y's Take on a Career (7/19/2012):

<http://talentmgt.com/articles/view/gen-y-s-take-on-a-career/1>

Generation X and The Millennials: What you Need to Know about Mentoring the New Generations (8/2004):

<http://apps.americanbar.org/lpm/lpt/articles/mgt08044.html>

Generation X at Work: Styles and Preferences (2/24/2012):

<http://blog.mindjet.com/2012/02/generation-x-at-work-styles-and-preferences/>

Flex Strategies Help Keep Boomers in the Workforce (4/20/12):

<http://talentmgt.com/articles/view/flex-strategies-help-keep-boomers-in-the-workforce>

Who are KAA-Boomers?

<http://www.workplaceinstitute.org/who-are-kaa-boomers/>

