POLICY STUDIES ASSOCIATES, INC.

YOUTH VOICE IN ACTION

Evaluation of the Youth Innovation Fund for Youth-Directed Civic Action

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May 2008

Prepared for the Academy of Educational Development,
with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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Executive Summary

The Youth Innovation Fund (YIF) was established in 2003 through a W.K. Kellogg Foundation signature 75th anniversary grant to the Academy for Educational Development (AED). To implement the YIF, the Partnership selected eight cities, which each would form a consortium of community-based organizations that would collaborate to create a youth board. The boards were intended to empower diverse groups of young people to gather information for educating themselves and others, organize themselves for collective action, and stimulate lasting civic change in their communities, as part of a two-phase, four-year initiative.

The central goal of the YIF is to develop and promote youth civic engagement in each community through strategies that include youth philanthropy, service-learning, youth governance, youth organizing, youth social entrepreneurship, and youth media. The YIF is grounded in the understanding that youth civic engagement contributes to a vibrant democracy by promoting (1) increased public engagement and improvement of civic institutions (as engaged youth stimulate and implement civic change) and (2) deep personal commitments to civic life and community change (as young leaders mature into adult leaders). Through the activities of the YIF in each community, the YIF is expected to promote changes in the young people participating in the initiative and in local institutions, systems, and communities.

AED contracted with Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (PSA) to conduct a four-year evaluation of the YIF. The evaluation was designed to answer two main questions:

- What conditions, policies, and supports are necessary to promote the successful establishment and operation of local youth-led boards, the involvement of young people in youth-directed civic action using a service-learning framework, increases in the supply and quality of service-learning, and the local endorsement and adoption of youth involvement in local civic affairs?

- What results do local sites foster through the establishment and operation of youth governing boards? That is, to what extent do local projects, through their efforts associated with the YIF, influence participating youth, service-learning practice, and local institutional culture regarding youth leadership as a primary goal and the provision of service-learning as a secondary goal?

This evaluation report focuses on the second research question to describe the achievements and challenges of the eight sites in the second phase of the YIF initiative.

Effects of the YIF Initiative on Youth

Case studies of the YIF youth boards in the eight cities documented major effects on youth, especially in the following areas:

- **Increased civic awareness.** Participation in the youth boards gave young people a much deeper sense of what was happening in their own community and increased their awareness of disparities, needs, and social inequities, setting the stage for civic engagement and action.

- **Sense of empowerment.** Participation helped young people understand their own capabilities, opportunities, and obligations to promote concrete improvement in their communities.

- **Commitment to the community.** Participation strengthened young people's ties to the communities in which they live by allowing them to take part in the creation and operation of "processes, systems, and infrastructure…that will support and enable young people to become and stay engaged in the future," as described in the Youth Fund's July 2007 statement of principles and methods.

- **Skill development**. A major and consistent effect was on the concrete leadership skills attained by youth. Other important skills developed by participating youth involved teamwork, capacity for reflection and analysis, and public-speaking and presentation skills.

- **Political advocacy knowledge and skills**. Youth in many cities developed a deep understanding of the political process, including the persistence, dedication, knowledge, and organization needed to advance a civic agenda and make change.

Effects of the YIF Initiative on Communities

The case studies also documented effects on the communities hosting the youth boards, especially in the following areas:

- **Increased youth voice in school districts.** Young people in several cities made impressive progress toward increasing the visibility of youth and the value attached to youth voice in decision-making in their school districts.

- **Increased youth voice in the community**. The boards formed and expanded community relationships to promote changes in the role of youth in community policy and decision-making.

- **Youth as organizers and conveners**. Through their ongoing efforts to convene partners and publicize their efforts and the importance of youth engagement, young people involved in youth boards in several communities became known as

experts in youth organizing and were called on to share their expertise with other youth councils and agencies.

- **Increased opportunities for service-learning**. Although youth boards experienced mixed success in this area, board members learned how to make the case for service-learning, mobilize support for their position, and push for adoption of increased service-learning opportunities.

- **Improved portrayal of youth in the media**. Youth engaged and used many forms of media for the purpose of publicizing youth voice as well as affecting mainstream media attention to and treatment of issues important to youth.

Program Features Linked to Success

Analyses of experiences across the eight cities found that youth boards were most successful in contributing to changes in the community and in the youth themselves when they adopted certain priorities.

- **Adapting to the local context**. The political and cultural context in which each of the youth boards operated varied widely, and the experiences of the boards in establishing themselves in their community depended, in part, on the success of the board in establishing an identity that both distinguished it from others and was aligned to community dynamics. The YIF consortium in each community contributed to the boards' work in adapting to local needs and capacities.

- **Identifying concrete goals and activities**. The boards were most successful when they focused on clear goals and well-defined milestones that the youth members, with the support of adult partners, could achieve. While maintaining the broad goals of youth engagement and policy change, concrete outreach and communication strategies and tactics motivated youth and improved their effectiveness in achieving civic change.

- **Balancing youth and adult roles**. Achieving the right balance between youth leadership and adult leadership was a key element in the success of the youth boards. Both were necessary to achieve the ambitious goals that the boards established, with the most effective adult partners acting as mentors, facilitators, and coaches.

- **Training youth board members**. In Phase II, as young people prepared to deepen their involvement in civic actions in the community and advocate for change in the city or school district, boards created training opportunities for youth to gain confidence and knowledge in specific leadership and presentation skills as well as other essential skills. They found that they needed ongoing training to enable the young people to address the challenges of achieving civic change.

Conclusions

The work of these eight Youth Innovation Fund sites during the second phase of the initiative demonstrates both the promise of engaging young people in civic action and the resources and capacities needed to fulfill that promise. Overall, through the persistence and commitment of the young people and their adult partners, local youth boards lobbied for increased youth voice and power in their schools and communities and established themselves as valuable resources for youth engagement and civic change. They brought social and educational inequities to the attention of policymakers, and they established ongoing channels of communication and dialogue with civic leaders. This work was not easy, and the boards were challenged to develop strong partnerships with schools, local agencies, and other groups, in order to build a foundation on which to achieve community change. However, by finding a niche in the community, identifying tangible goals, and providing relevant and ongoing learning opportunities, the boards increased the civic knowledge and capacities of the young people involved and helped them to develop concrete skills that will enable them to continue to be engaged as active citizens and to drive home ongoing needs for social justice and youth voice, as highlighted in the YIF initiative. Through this work, the boards achieved notable civic changes in their cities, especially by documenting inequities and demonstrating the value of youth voice in civic decision-making. As expressed in the Youth Fund's July 2007 statement, the boards, using diverse methods within their very different communities, succeeded in "changing the way in which youth civic engagement is conceptualized, encouraged, and supported." They also helped to "create permanent systems and structures that will encourage and support youth-directed community change" in the future, as envisioned in the 2007 statement.

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1. Introduction and Overview

Overview of the Youth Innovation Fund

The Youth Innovation Fund (YIF) was established in the summer of 2003 through a W.K. Kellogg Foundation signature 75th anniversary grant to the Academy for Educational Development (AED). The Partnership selected eight cities, which each would form a consortium of community-based organizations that would collaborate to create a youth board. The boards were intended to empower diverse groups of young people to assert themselves as active citizens and create lasting change in their communities, as part of a two-phase, four-year initiative. Through the national initiative, each of the eight sites received $100,000 a year for the first two years of the initiative to establish a youth board and $50,000 to $90,000 a year for the second two years to implement strategies that would increase and sustain youth voice, value, and visibility in the community.

The central goal of the YIF is to develop and promote youth civic engagement in each community through varied strategies, including youth philanthropy, service-learning, youth governance, youth organizing, youth social entrepreneurship, and youth media. The YIF is grounded in the belief that youth civic engagement contributes to a vibrant democracy by promoting (1) increased public engagement and the improvement of civic institutions (as engaged youth stimulate and implement civic change) and (2) deep personal commitments to civic life and community change (as young leaders mature into adult leaders). Through the activities of the YIF in each community, the YIF was expected to promote changes in the young people participating in the initiative and in local institutions, systems, and communities.

In Phase I of the YIF initiative, from the summer of 2003 to the summer of 2005, the eight sites undertook activities to establish their local operational infrastructure for increasing youth voice, value, and visibility. The eight sites are located in Chicago, IL, Cleveland, MS, Hampton, VA, Nashville, TN, Portland, ME, Portland, OR, San Francisco, CA, and Ypsilanti, MI. Working with a consortium of local organizations, each site established a youth board comprised of young people between the ages of 12 and 19 who, with the guidance of a full-time coordinator and other adult partners, conducted in-depth community-mapping and power analyses and awarded mini-grants to teams of young people for civic action projects addressing community needs. Based on the lessons learned through these Phase I activities, each youth board developed an impact plan for Phase II of the YIF initiative, lasting through summer 2007. In these plans, each site outlined a strategy to implement targeted campaigns to address issues identified as important by young people in Phase I and to change systems, policies, and structures to support lasting civic engagement in their communities.

Through their YIF activities in Phase II, young people in the eight sites continued to establish their roles in their communities as agents of civic action, serving as advocates for community change with city and school leaders, conveners of other young people and adults, and models and advisors to other groups seeking to advocate for community change. As this inaugural cohort of eight Youth Innovation Fund sites reaches the end of the funded initiative and considers how to sustain youth voice, engagement, and action in each community, AED

looks ahead to replicating and expanding the YIF model. This report describes the Phase II achievements and challenges of the eight sites, and presents cross-cutting findings for future initiatives based on the lessons learned through the YIF initiative.

Overview of the Evaluation

AED contracted with Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (PSA) to conduct a four-year evaluation of the YIF. The evaluation was designed to answer two main questions:

- What conditions, policies, and supports are necessary to promote the successful establishment and operation of local youth-led boards, the involvement of young people in youth-directed civic action using a service-learning framework, increases in the supply and quality of service-learning, and the local endorsement and adoption of youth involvement in local civic affairs?

- What results do local sites foster through the establishment and operation of youth governing boards? That is, to what extent do local projects, through their efforts associated with the YIF, influence participating youth, service-learning practice, and local institutional culture regarding youth leadership as a primary goal and the provision of service-learning as a secondary goal?

Phase I of the evaluation focused primarily on addressing the first research question about conditions, policies, and supports for youth boards (Russell, Smith, Afolabi, & Anderson, 2006). The Phase I evaluation report concluded that, despite challenges in implementing an ambitious timeline during the first two years of the YIF initiative, the YIF boards contributed to a deeper understanding of their communities among young people and allowed young people opportunities to improve their leadership skills, increase their civic awareness, and gain confidence about youth voice in the community. The evaluation also identified early signs of change in the communities, most notably an increased awareness of youth voice and a commitment to better engaging youth in decisions and operations. The current report builds on lessons learned in Phase I of the initiative, but focuses on the activities and results of each site in Phase II to draw lessons about effective approaches to engaging youth in civic action in order to foster outcomes for youth and for local institutions and communities.

Reflecting the individual strategies and campaigns undertaken by each of the eight sites, PSA collected in-depth data from each site through in-person and telephone interviews during Phase II of the evaluation. This data collection was supplemented by a survey administered to all active youth board members in the spring of each year. More specifically, data collected included:

- **Site visits and interviews.** PSA researchers conducted in-person and telephone interviews with each site in spring 2006 and in spring 2007. These interviews addressed the sites' Phase II activities, formation of community relationships, receipt of training and other supports, and progress in achieving goals and

objectives related to community outreach and impacts. In each site, PSA interviewed coordinators, youth, and adult partners.

- **Survey of youth board members.** PSA administered surveys to youth board members in spring 2006 and spring 2007. The youth survey captured information about the young people's demographic characteristics, general level of civic engagement and knowledge, and their YIF experience and participation. A total of 85 youth from the eight sites responded to a survey in 2006 and 51 youth from six sites responded in 2007. Based on the membership rosters provided by the site coordinators, this represents a response rate of 73 percent in 2006 and 45 percent among responding sites in 2007. To best represent the experience across sites in Phase II, survey analyses in this report combine responses received in both 2006 and 2007, for a total of 122 surveys. Fourteen youth responded in both years and are each represented once in the analyses.

This report presents a case study of each of the eight sites' experience implementing the initiative as well as a cross-site analysis. The report describes the implementation of Youth Fund activities and, in particular, the various strategies that sites used to create changes in school and community policies and attitudes towards youth. The case studies and cross-site analysis also describe the effects of YIF participation on young people and their communities, and concludes by summarizing lessons learned about effective approaches to increasing youth civic engagement.

2. Youth Innovation Fund — Chicago, Illinois

Implementation

Community Context

The Youth Innovation Fund in Chicago (YIF Chicago) operates in the context of a large, diverse and youthful city. The third largest city in the United States, Chicago is home to nearly three million residents, with approximately one-quarter of the population under the age of 18. According to 2000 U.S. Census data, 37 percent of the population is African American, followed by 31 percent white, 26 percent Latino or Hispanic, and 4 percent Asian. Nearly 36 percent of residents speak a language other than English at home. The city's median household income of $38,626 is below the state median income level of $46,590.

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system enrolls more than 400,000 students in 622 schools, including 114 public high schools serving more than 100,000 students. According to CPS data, the system's student population is 48 percent African-American and 38 percent Latino; 86 percent of CPS students are from low-income families.

CPS requires that all high school students participate in at least 40 hours of service-learning in order to graduate, although the requirement does not necessarily engage students in meaningful service experiences addressing real needs in the city, according to city sources. The CPS Director of Service-Learning explained:

> *CPS launched itself into service-learning without any infrastructure [or] training. They were seeking the lowest common denominator and, as a result, developed bad habits quickly. That is, people were scrambling to do anything to get service-learning credit hours. Kids keeping track of the clock at football games were getting service-learning hours.*

Within this context, YIF Chicago, with its focus on engaging youth in projects that address root causes of community problems, provided a unique opportunity for service-learning experiences to the young people of Chicago.

Establishment of the Youth Board in Phase I

Following the model established by the national Youth Innovation Fund initiative, YIF Chicago established its youth board to lay the foundation for youth-directed civic action through community research and grants for youth-led projects. YIF Chicago launched its Phase I in 2003 under the guidance of the Mikva Challenge, a nonprofit organization dedicated to engaging Chicago youth in the democratic process through programs in public policy and leadership development. Three additional partners rounded out the consortium: the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago, the CPS Service-Learning Department, and the Illinois Campaign for Violence Prevention.

Recruitment. The consortium, with the help of founding youth members, selected an energetic young professional as the coordinator to lead the implementation of YIF Chicago. YIF Chicago recruited adult board members through their consortium partners, intentionally selecting five adult partners with differing skills to mentor participating youth and launch the youth board. Additionally, YIF Chicago actively recruited a diverse cohort of young people representing many neighborhoods and high schools in the Chicago area.

Activities. As part of the community-mapping and power-analysis exercise of the Youth Innovation Fund model, YIF Chicago undertook an extensive action research project in Phase I. Using a survey developed by young people on the youth board, the board surveyed more than 300 high school students in the city and identified pressing youth concerns in four areas: schooling (e.g., teacher-student relationships and school conditions), employment (e.g., availability of summer work and internships), violence (e.g., involving gangs, dating, domestic relations), and health (e.g., stress management, depression, sex education).

Based on these youth-identified topics, the young people of YIF Chicago developed a mini-grant Request for Proposals (RFP) and planned a bidders' conference to publicize and explain the mini-grant opportunity to youth who might be interested in designing and undertaking a project to address one or more areas of concern identified in the survey. At the bidders' conference, youth board members directed workshops and information sessions on the grant application process and on how to clarify a project idea and develop strategies for civic action. Using a rubric-based decision-making process that the young people developed, YIF Chicago awarded a total of 16 grants in Phase I to youth-led projects that addressed long-term civic change in the four identified areas.

Both the adults and youth of YIF Chicago reported that organizing the bidders' conference helped the young people of the youth board to become more specific about what they were learning about youth engagement through their action research activities. The bidders' conference added meaning and realism to their efforts and their vision of youth-led civic engagement. According to one youth member:

> *In the beginning, we were just full of ideas and were not sure what kind of impact we would have on the city. When I was reading the applications and found out what groups would be funded, it felt good to know we were funding all kinds of projects that would affect the city [in] all kinds of wonderful ways.*

The site coordinator added:

> *It [the bidders' conference] put them on the same page philosophically. The weeks of designing the conference, the grants, and such helped the youth solidify their concept of service-learning and made them strong in the program.*

Training. In Phase I, several young people had the opportunity to participate in local as well as national cross-site training sessions to better understand the goals of the YIF initiative. Youth members spoke positively of the retreat and cross-site training sessions. According to one youth member who attended the YIF Chicago retreat:

It's powerful seeing people in their pajamas. We learned a lot about each other, that we weren't different people. We're all the same in our pajamas. We're not different because of our color. The retreat was important because it came early in the life of the board, and we spent a lot of time together.

This trip gave us the opportunity to step back and look at the whole project. We saw other people doing the same thing and devoted to the same issue — that was really powerful. It was important to meet people from different places. We met black people from Mississippi, California. Just because we're all black doesn't mean we're all the same.

An important activity in Phase I was a visit by the youth board to San Francisco for a cross-site network meeting, during which the YIF youth boards learned about the youth advisory council to the superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District. This visit planted the seed of an idea in the minds of board members.

Phase II YIF Chicago Goals

Recognizing the role that schools play in shaping the lives of youth and in influencing larger social issues, the Phase II activities of YIF Chicago focused on creating structural and institutional changes within the school system. In the first phase of the initiative, through surveys of Chicago youth, YIF Chicago had identified several student concerns, as earlier noted. Youth board surveys of Chicago high school youth showed that only 15 percent of respondents reported that they possessed the knowledge, resources, and power to address these issues in their schools. To make it possible for students to voice their ideas, YIF Chicago proposed the following Phase II campaigns to create the conditions necessary for institutional change:

- **Powerful youth advisory councils.** YIF Chicago proposed to serve as a youth advisory council to the CEO of Chicago Public Schools. YIF Chicago also planned to conduct a representative election process to institutionalize this CEO Advisory Council. In addition, YIF Chicago aimed to train youth advocacy councils to work with school principals, creating structures within each Chicago school for youth voice.

- ***I Dream a City service-learning.*** YIF Chicago proposed to partner with the CPS Service-Learning Department to strengthen its focus on justice-oriented service-learning. YIF Chicago planned to challenge students and teachers to critically assess their communities and create the conditions for long-term improvement. Youth leaders would provide training in civic-action strategies and play an integral role in CPS workshops on service-learning. YIF Chicago also planned to promote promising service-learning projects in local media.

- **Alliances for long-term institutionalization.** In this campaign, YIF Chicago planned to develop an infrastructure that would maintain opportunities for the young people of Chicago to engage in civic activities by strengthening relationships and partnerships among youth leaders and education advocacy groups. YIF Chicago proposed to push for institutional change in the school district's governance structure to ensure that young people were always invited to participate in meetings regarding youth issues. To sustain the mini-grant project, YIF Chicago and partners also would explore development of an endowment fund.

YIF Chicago Activities in Phase II

At the beginning of Phase II, YIF Chicago hired a coordinator whose first task was to recruit new youth members to replace the 13 YIF Chicago members who graduated from high school at the end of Phase I. To increase the diversity of the board, the recruitment process targeted young men and students with limited leadership opportunities in their schools or communities. The coordinator described the recruitment challenge:

> *A lot [of members] are the rock-star students who are over-involved. It's great, but you want to target some of those other students who don't get the leadership opportunities but who could blossom if given the chance. It's a tough balance because you want the best kids, but you also want the underserved.*

Phase II training. In Phase II, training and team-building for youth board members were critically important, as the board looked to launch a series of ambitious campaigns with a large group of young people — and a coordinator — new to the board and goals of YIF. Although there was not as much emphasis on training in Phase I as in Phase II, the lack of experience among new members required supplementary team building and training sessions, at the same time that experienced members were also planning other project events. According to the new coordinator, "We had to sacrifice a lot … some got what YIF is about, but a lot of [new members] were confused." Since student turnover is inevitable each year, YIF Chicago had to recruit and rebuild the group dynamic and skills each year.

In light of this turnover, the leadership of the Mikva Challenge paused to focus on training and engaging the new board at the beginning of Phase II, rather than launching directly into the emerging Phase II campaigns. According to the executive director of the Mikva Challenge:

> *One thing Chicago has done well, is taken the time to do youth development work and team leadership building and training. That's 50 percent of the project. You can't task students until they are ready to work. That's a tension in the project and was a huge issue in Phase I.*

CEO advisory council. In Phase II, as described above, YIF Chicago focused its major efforts on the CEO's Student Advisory Council, the youth advisory committee to the Chicago

Public Schools CEO. This advisory council was a key means for the group to exert a structural, system-wide impact on youth voice in Chicago, consistent with YIF goals. The San Francisco visit had illustrated how important such a council would be in influencing the school system's policies and practices. Accordingly, the Mikva Challenge executive director proposed the idea to the CPS CEO, drawing on the strength of their personal relationship.

YIF Chicago realized that it was unrealistic to develop an elected student council that represented the more than 100,000 CPS high school students, as did the San Francisco model. The site coordinator explained, "Instead of a representative body, we are now framing ourselves as an action research group. We become experts on an issue, informed by our knowledge and contacts with other CPS students."

The youth board's goals for the quarterly meetings with the CEO were to discuss visible issues that directly affect students and concern school officials, such as youth violence and student achievement. The coordinator reported that the advisory council's intended annual cycle was to raise a list of topics with the CEO for his reaction in the winter meeting, so that the council could develop an action plan for addressing the issues. In the spring meeting they would update the CEO on their action steps and then wrap up the year in a summer meeting.

Launching this effort was not easy, however. Youth members who participated in the advisory council struggled in the beginning with speaking to a person in authority. An adult partner explained:

> *The challenge for the youth council is how to have powerful meetings. Sometimes with new youth and staff, they freeze up. You only get four or five shots at [the CEO] throughout the year. It takes time for youth to get comfortable.*

The YIF Chicago group worked with their adult partners to prepare for these meetings and develop talking points through role play and practice. Participants reported that the meetings were successful because of the CEO's genuine interest in engaging students and hearing their perspectives, although, according to the coordinator, "he's supportive of student voice but hard to nail down to do something.… We haven't been that good at really hammering and making our task clear and getting an answer." Nonetheless, all respondents agreed that the formation and operation of the CEO advisory council was a major accomplishment.

Based on an analysis of likely impact, YIF Chicago made a decision to focus its efforts on the CEO advisory council rather than also pressing for changes in the CPS service-learning program and principal advisory councils, as it had proposed in its Phase II plan. "In the plan, the goal was to push for project-based service-learning. That's something we advocate for but not actively, it's not a direct push any more." In addition, YIF Chicago found that it was more productive to focus on the CEO advisory council than to develop principal advisory councils at the same time. Work on partnerships with principals was sidelined, in part, because principals showed little support for this priority. Furthermore, youth members could see that they would need to generate more authority and resources to permit them to step in and guide local councils. The coordinator explained:

There was principal interference because some didn't like the idea; they didn't want to meet with students. We didn't seek principal approval at the beginning, so that became a rub—they felt their authority was being usurped.… It was overly ambitious.

Training of school security personnel. One important result of the CEO advisory council meetings was an invitation for YIF Chicago to participate in the annual back-to-school training for school security personnel in 2006. In response to ongoing concerns over the often-tense relationships between students and security staff, the CEO invited members of YIF Chicago to bring the youth perspective to the district's annual training. In response to this invitation, youth prepared a plan for their role in the training and developed dramatic presentations intended to direct trainees' attention to key concerns and to promote dialogue between security personnel and students. The training sessions were considered by all to have achieved these objectives. The security training also attracted media attention through the *Chicago Tribune* and received positive feedback from students who said security changed at their schools after the workshop.

For both the young people and adults involved, the training demonstrated the value of youth voice in addressing youth issues in CPS. As a result of this success, the CEO asked YIF Chicago to participate annually in school-security training. According to one youth member:

[There were] some glitches, but overall it was amazing. It makes things come full circle. Youth voice was the missing link out of it, and [now] CPS can make some progress. [We] have a long way to go but have started to get youth voice out there and get our name out.

The success of the training underscored the value of the CEO advisory council and helped build the council's credibility and influence. Buoyed by their success, the young people felt more prepared and better able to communicate their interests and concerns during meetings. According to one youth member, "Now that we've proven ourselves, with the rally and security training, we're more of a force with him." One consortium partner described the relationship:

He [the CEO] loved our security guard training and asked us to do it annually. [He's] great in meetings, asks our students to think hard about things. He's interested in speaking with students and knowing what issues they're dealing with. He genuinely likes meeting with our students.

In addition, the visible success of YIF Chicago's security-guard training established the group as a model of youth engagement in the city and increased interest among other departments and agencies in exploring ways to build youth councils. For example, the young people of YIF Chicago were called on to assist and train other youth leaders in Chicago, including advice to a new CPS student organization that enlisted YIF Chicago's help in creating its action plan. "[They] wanted us to run workshops, so students could see how to go through the process of taking their ideas and moving to action." An adult partner added:

On the systems change piece, we have helped to build a model for Chicago schools of how an advisory council can be helpful to decision-makers. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Once we started doing that council, there was a lot of motion around it.

Even within CPS, the school district is reaching out and looking for youth feedback much more… It's become the norm now to ask for youth input. So I think the long-term impact is creating a powerful youth council model that can be replicated at the school level and within city departments.

School funding advocacy. In the second year of Phase II, the YIF Chicago also participated in state-level advocacy efforts to promote increased school funding. According to the coordinator, school funding is "always on students' mind — outdated textbooks, dilapidated conditions in the schools…" In 2007, the political situation in Illinois, with a Democratic majority in both the state House and Senate and simultaneous pressure from the business community to develop a more educated work force, created a unique opportunity to rally around school funding legislation. YIF Chicago partnered with A+ Illinois, an organization that advocates for increased school funding, to recruit and organize students from Chicago area schools to plan and attend a rally in Springfield in spring 2007. CPS also supported the effort by promising transportation and time off from school to youth who wanted to attend the rally. In the end, according to the coordinator, youth organizers made plans for 4,000 Chicago youth to go to Springfield on the day of the rally, although because of "botched operations" most buses did not make it there in time. Nonetheless, a core group of YIF Chicago members participated in the Springfield rally, gathering signatures on a petition, making speeches, and going into government buildings to lobby legislators. The coordinator summarized, "The rally was a big success and they felt they had done a great job, and were feeling part of what had happened." This experience presented a unique opportunity for youth to learn about government influence and decision-making through direct action.

Youth philanthropy. The Phase I youth-philanthropy focus of YIF Chicago took a back seat to the CEO advisory council in Phase II. An adult partner noted that, in the first phase:

We spent half of our tasking time seeding these cool projects. What's a struggle on that is that we've had a big impact, but because the end goal is systems change, we are dropping youth philanthropy. It's hard because we've invested time and money, but we're giving up because it's not systems change.

The transition away from awarding mini-grants as a key element of the work was gradual, reflecting the group's belief that youth philanthropy served an important role in developing and promoting YIF Chicago. In addition to galvanizing youth into civic action, the grant selection process in Phase I helped board members to learn how to analyze the merits of a project while debating the meaning of social change. In the first year of Phase II, several youth members continued to identify and award mini-grants to groups of local youth to implement projects for improving school safety and quality in Chicago. These continued awards built a sense of empowerment among youth and provided concrete examples of youth-driven solutions to school concerns, which the young people described in their meetings with the CPS CEO. "It was able to connect with the CEO advisory council goals in a more tangible way." For example, a board member noted that they had funded several mentorship programs in the latest cycle, and this had given the board a better basis to request support for mentorship programs from the CEO. According to one youth on the grant committee:

Other youth giving them money gives them a sense that they can actually do something. Mostly when you want to do something, one of the major problems is "Do I have enough money to do this?" YIF gives them a chance to make that concrete, gives them a chance to do something. [It's] more inspiring. We can connect with them better through philanthropy.

However, with additional work and funds devoted to the CEO advisory council and other YIF activities, by the second year of Phase II, "grant-making now has almost been an after-thought. It's too much with the CEO advisory council.… It's too bad, it can be a great thing, but [there is] too much work and not enough time." Looking ahead, the coordinator can envision separate but linked youth groups focusing on philanthropy and on the CEO advisory council. Each group would build on the accomplishments of the other.

Effects on Young People and Their Community

Effects on Youth

Increased civic knowledge and engagement. Young people reported that through their experiences with YIF Chicago they had developed a deeper understanding of the concrete requirements of effective civic action. They also said that they learned a great deal about CPS and their community through their participation in YIF Chicago. The opportunity to work with peers from different schools and to review grant proposals from communities across Chicago allowed youth members to identify common concerns. In many cases, members realized the similarities among their schools. According to one member, "I learned that my school is not the only school with problems. I would think that it is the worst, but other schools are going through similar things."

In general, youth members remained optimistic about making a difference in a large school system like CPS. As one youth explained:

It's big to learn that there are efforts to improve, and there are things to be done. Working with [the CEO] and Mikva, there are a lot of different efforts to bring democracy and youth voice to school. I see that my contribution helped advance those efforts. I think the trend is that we are jumping on board to initiatives that adult people have done.

An adult partner explained:

I think that they have a much deeper understanding of the complexity of issues and of the need for organization and preparation. Just because you have an idea doesn't mean it is going anywhere. They have a much better grasp of preparation, presentation, and acting. They have gone through the process. They were totally unprepared for some information that [the CEO] threw at them, so they had to respond.

In addition, the site coordinator reported changes in youth members' engagement at school and in their future plans:

> *I know that a couple of our students decided to run to be on their LSCs [Local School Council], and they just weren't thinking about that before. [A youth member] who had wanted to be an investment banker now wants to do justice-related law and pursue something that has to do with the public good, whether it's politics or just being more civically engaged. He was a completely different person before.*

Youth also learned about working effectively with youth from very different backgrounds. A youth member commented:

> *I learn a lot from other board members. One member's father is a diplomat. She told me interesting things about the Sikh community. There are a lot of Asians [Indian/Pakistani] in school, and I hadn't had conversations with them before.*

An adult partner added:

> *The YIF took students from a mix of economic and ethnic and cultural backgrounds as board members. [We] have one board member from my own high school; [we] have board members from the inner city schools.*

Personal and leadership skills. Through their participation in YIF, young people also developed their interpersonal and leadership skills. As one youth member explained, "Sometimes we have informal conversations with each other about what we're about. This is social change for us because of what we're learning about each other." Another youth added:

> *I was under the influence of certain things or stereotypes that I later found to be untrue. We're more alike than different. I discovered that we have more in common — it's more personal than just being a part of a race. Sometimes we like to do things because of who we are, not because of our race.*

In terms of leadership, many youth reported increased confidence when they needed to speak in public or during meetings. One youth member revealed, "I was the one who didn't say anything at the meeting, [but] over time I've gotten involved more with the public speaking aspect." Training workshops held by the national YIF forced members to learn how to guide and teach other youths. Planning for YIF Chicago events also sharpened the analytical skills of youth members, as did their work with the mini-grant process. Members debated the meaning of long-term change as evidenced in mini-grant proposals and offered suggestions to rejected proposals.

Finally, youth learned to be realistic about what was feasible for them to take on. As the coordinator described:

> *They have learned a lot about the things they can do …. and also realized how hard it is…. They learned how much hard work is involved in executing these things. They can't*

be organizing a student summit and also organizing a rally. They haven't necessarily become less idealistic, but they have honed in on what they are capable of doing.

Effects on the Community

The efforts of YIF Chicago established structures and laid a foundation in which youth engagement could continue to thrive in the schools and in the city. The influence of youth voice was evident through the quarterly meetings with the CEO of Chicago Public Schools and participation in the training of CPS school security personnel as well as the solicitation, selection, and award of mini-grants.

Youth are increasingly perceived as important resources for the schools and the larger Chicago community. This is especially evident through YIF Chicago's interactions with the CPS CEO. One youth member noted, "I think [the CEO] is starting to see it, and he's opening the door between the younger generation and the people at CPS." In the minds of many adults, the security-guard training sessions demonstrated the power of youth in addressing youth-related issues. The training sessions depicted youth voice as an asset and as part of the solution to student problems. Consortium partners added:

I think [the CEO] has a new respect for our students. He thought they were good kids, but now he sees them as a resource. After the outcry over…, he got a lot of fire about it and not including other people's voice and the youth. For that reason and how impressive our youth have been, he is trying to utilize youth voice more. He was always receptive to meeting with students, but now he takes them more seriously.

Especially in education, they have definitely penetrated [perceptions] with some influential adults. Considering how large the [CPS] system is, at least half have an idea of what ... YIF is about.

Sustainability

Funding Concerns

At the end of Phase II, YIF Chicago expected to continue its work as an ongoing project of the Mikva Challenge, although the YIF Chicago leadership agreed that fundraising was a critical issue for sustainability. Considering the scope and depth of the work that the youth board has produced in the past four years, the staff hoped that local philanthropists will provide financial support. All were aware, however, that YIF Chicago must compete for funding with other youth organizations in the city.

I think we can do it. The youth work has been impressive, and there should be some funders out there for this in Chicago. It's a new kind of project and so sometimes it's hard to find the funder who gets the work, and we have struggled. We will put up general operational money, but we have to find a couple of dedicated funders. From the national

side, they think Chicago is a big city with a lot of money, but it's a square peg project that doesn't fit into the big projects scheme.

The young people involved in YIF Chicago acknowledged the importance of having strong staff members to guide them in their work and facilitate connections and the associated staff costs. "It's totally us doing it, but we need that guidance. There's so much we don't know…. They also make sure that we're focused when in our meetings, and make sure that we have everything we need to get the job done." According to an adult partner:

[The work of YIF Chicago] is a pretty sophisticated game. Because it's youth-led/youth-organized and they don't necessarily have that political sophistication, we have to help them read the political tea leaves and be more directive. It's a huge opportunity, and I'm not sure youth understand that.… It's 90 percent youth-run, but you have to provoke them with training and ideas. You have to be careful about not becoming too adult-led, but you have to tell them what you know.

Institutionalization

A continuing challenge for YIF Chicago is how to create a sustained presence within local governance structures. The adult leaders of the board realize that they have benefited from a series of advantageous circumstances. Importantly, key policymakers are interested in youth voice, and YIF Chicago has been able to build on existing inside-outside partnerships between leaders of CPS and the Mikva Challenge. However, they are also aware of the need to implant themselves in CPS decision-making procedures in a way that does not depend on all these factors aligning. The CEO advisory council, for instance, relies on the interest of the CEO in meeting regularly with young people and is not currently written into CPS policy.

The board had struggled with the question of whether working to become institutionalized into the CPS system is desirable or whether its impact would be greater as an external, independent voice for youth. YIF Chicago was not the first CPS youth advisory council, but the external nature of the YIF Chicago council brought CPS a unique perspective. As the coordinator described:

Another question in terms of the identity of the board is institutionalization — we're not written into the CPS constitution or any by-laws. There is no guarantee with another CEO. But, we also don't want to get totally co-opted. If we go through official challenges, or get financial support, there are more strings attached.… I like the independent angle of things, and a good number of students like that, too.

An adult partner also commented on the need to maintain a careful balance between external pressure and institutionalization:

When people are elected or appointed, you don't really have the capacity to move on issues like an external organization might have.… It's important to have an internal-external partnership because the external partners represent the edge. The external

partner can really push the edge for the district. But it can't just be an external partner, you need to have institutionalization on the inside.

At the end of Phase II, YIF Chicago was exploring various avenues to pursue to encourage the sustained presence of youth voice in CPS. For example, the executive director of the Mikva Challenge noted that he "will urge youth to think about gaining budgetary control — some input on budgetary decisions, spending money on supporting youth leadership. Power is not the school board voting power but a tradition of giving youth money for power."

Lessons Learned

All parties agreed to the importance of the civic-action accomplishments of YIF Chicago and its value to the city and to participating young people. Key lessons focused on process.

Defining the Role of Partner Organizations

The adult leadership of YIF Chicago reflected on the challenges of determining the youth board's identity within a large consortium of organizations. While links to multiple resources and organizations provided the youth board with access to resources, one lead agency may be sufficient to effectively launch and sustain a focused youth engagement initiative, they determined. They concluded that a large consortium blurred the responsibilities of each partner while decreasing the power of the youth board. As described by the director of the Mikva Challenge, "I don't know that the consortium is necessary over time. One agency that has a good grasp on the political landscape of a community is enough to house the board."

The CPS partner described his role primarily as a liaison between the district and the Mikva Challenge, working to build support for youth voice from within the inside of the district:

I am part of the founding consortium, and I continue to be involved in close contact with Mikva. A big part of my job in the past couple of years is to develop a strong inside-outside strategy....

The site coordinator noted that the relationship with the district was important to the work of YIF Chicago, as a "key ally through the entire thing…. Really just working with CPS, having him as a liaison."

Over the course of the YIF initiative, the consortium supporting YIF Chicago narrowed, although the group maintained a strong partnership with the Service-Learning Department of CPS. In Phase II of the initiative, the Mikva Challenge emphasized its identity as the lead agency for YIF Chicago. This approach was successful because the lead agency had the capacity and experience to guide youth through the initiative and provide the necessary supports to young people as they learned to advocate for change in their schools and community. Chicago benefited from the long-standing youth-leadership focus of the Mikva Challenge, both in providing training to young people and in having easy visibility and access to local resources.

According to the coordinator, "Mikva does a great and visible job with youth voice and leadership.… Mikva gets a lot of press for the civics fair, lots of attention being brought to young people doing productive things in the community. It's a confluence of all of those different factors." The special qualifications of the Mikva Challenge to fill this role, however, suggest that the organization may be unique in ways that make it not a model for other communities.

Team-Building and Training

Much of the success of YIF Chicago can be attributed to the time spent building both the camaraderie and specific skills of the young people involved in the board. As already described, training in both Phases I and II were critical to developing the skills needed for later work. In Phase II, for example, training focused largely on preparing for the work of the CEO advisory council. Consortium partners worked with the young people to prepare them to talk to a person in authority, teaching them how to organize and articulate ideas in a meeting, and how to prepare for unexpected questions. Despite these efforts, the adult leaders noted that their efforts were hampered by the limited time for workshops and retreats. The coordinator explained, "We definitely need more [formal training] — more on how to run a meeting, identify decision-making behavior. We've done role plays…how to structure agendas, but it's all been informal."

Building on these experiences, YIF Chicago planned an intensive team-building and training experience for the summer of 2007. YIF Chicago planned to recruit a new cohort of board members through a paid internship program lasting six weeks and 15 hours each week, which would help YIF Chicago "do team-building and skill-development so we can hit the ground running when the school year starts. It takes a decent amount of time to bond a board and get them to work effectively." This summer work was under the theme of "healthy, safe schools" through which students anticipated advocating for peer mentorship and school funding reform, issues they had begun to address in Phase II. The coordinator described that her end goal for the summer was to have a set of concrete recommendations for the CEO on how to better involve students in the process of creating safe and healthy schools, to have a set of recommendations for teachers and principals on how to promote these goals in the schools and to establish youth-led training for other youth on how to contribute to safe and healthy schools.

May 2008 update, provided by AED:

3. Cleveland Youth Council — Cleveland, Mississippi

Implementation

Community Context

The Cleveland Youth Council (CYC) was designed to empower young people in a Mississippi Delta town with few opportunities for youth engagement and limited resources for youth. Cleveland, Mississippi, is located in Bolivar County and has a population of 13,841, according to the 2000 Census. Approximately half of Cleveland residents are white, and half are black; vestiges of railroad tracks that once racially divided the city still mark the racial separation. Twenty-six percent of Cleveland's population lives below the federal poverty line. Government is the main employer in Cleveland, followed by services and manufacturing. Delta State University, part of Mississippi's public university system, is located in Cleveland and enrolls approximately 4,200 students, of whom 76 percent are from the Delta region.

The schools in the Cleveland School District are divided largely along racial and income lines. The district serves approximately 3,700 students in 12 schools. Approximately 70 percent of the students in the district are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Two public high schools and one private high school enroll local students. East Side High School enrolls 512 students and serves a nearly all African-American student population, 89 percent of whom are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Cleveland High School, which enrolls 577 students, is 59 percent white and 38 percent African-American; 40 percent of its students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Cleveland's private school, the Bayou Academy, enrolls about 100 students in grades 9-12 and is nearly all white.

Although the Cleveland School District had a service-learning requirement prior to the establishment of the youth board, the district coordinator for service-learning explained that the requirement led to little youth civic engagement because teachers typically determined the types of service that youth pursued. In addition, the young people who contributed to the original YIF proposal wrote that decisions that affected youth in Cleveland were typically made without youth input. The Phase II impact plan also noted that, as a result of historical tensions around race in the community, the local emphasis had been on developing equal racial representation of adults on community boards and committees rather than on including youth. A youth board member explained:

> *I've lived in Cleveland my whole life. You have to wait until you're an adult to really do anything around here. That's why I think a lot of people get in trouble. They ride the streets, and are influenced to do other things.*

Establishment of the Youth Board in Phase I

The proposal written for the original YIF grant named three goals for the CYC: (1) to establish solid youth-adult partnerships; (2) to engage youth, community partners, and teachers

in learning the meaning of service-learning; and (3) to encourage civic action among youth. The mission statement adopted by the CYC further stated that the council's purpose was "to establish a diverse representation of our peers while creating a youth voice and to encourage student-led civic action within our community."

Upon receiving the YIF grant, the CYC was established through the Delta Center for Culture and Learning at Delta State University. The Center's mission is to "promote the understanding of the history and culture of the Mississippi Delta" through interdisciplinary classes, field trips and tours, and service-learning and community-outreach programs. The CYC also partnered with local community organizations that could provide a point of entry into the community and access to local resources and networks: the Cleveland School District, the Bolivar County Community Action Agency, and the Cleveland-Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce.

Youth and adult members were recruited to the Council with the goal of creating a diverse, committed group. Through intentional outreach, the adult partners and coordinator succeeded in bringing together a group of youth representing each of the high schools. The original cohort of youth members was identified by school counselors in the two public high schools. After the grant was awarded, additional youth members were directly recruited from the private high school, and others were recruited through the youth board rally and through surveys administered in each of the high schools. In response to turnover in the board during the second year of Phase I, returning youth members participated in recruiting new members by interviewing potential candidates and voting on the youth to whom CYC would extend membership offers. Adult partners were also recruited by the coordinator to oversee and advise each of the four CYC committees in Phase I, including committees on grants, fundraising, evaluation, and media. The coordinator oversaw the executive committee.

The community-mapping and power analysis that the CYC conducted as part of the YIF model in Phase I prepared the youth for later success by informing and guiding their activities and campaigns. An adult partner explained:

> *When the youth organized the teen summit and invited community leaders to a panel discussion, the leaders knew the youth had a voice and knew what they were talking about. I think that it was a result of the community-mapping and power analysis they did in Phase I.*

The CYC also awarded mini-grants to youth applicants in Phase I. The grants committee prepared and distributed a RFP for mini-grants, and the board chose the applications that would receive grants. Initially, three proposals were received: two focusing on education and one on drug and teen pregnancy prevention, which were followed later by other proposals. Following application review and grant award, one grant supported youth in an adolescent offenders program in hosting a Teen Café night, which provided youth in the community with a safe place to hang out. Another grant enabled youth to produce a coloring book that taught children about local culture and history. In total, the board awarded over $9,700 in mini-grants to eight groups of youth during Phase I.

Phase II CYC Goals

The CYC's impact plan outlined four priorities for Phase II, all of which centered on using youth voice to create change in Cleveland. Through discussions of lessons learned in Phase I, young people and their adult partners framed the four campaigns to address a "youth voice void" in the community. The priorities for Phase II refined and expanded the goals established in Phase I. The four campaigns were:

- **Youth governance**, evolving from the Phase I goal of establishing youth-adult partnerships, because youth realized they wanted a more powerful, active role in their community

- **Youth organizing**, developed through the interest that the Delta Center for Culture and Learning generated in sharing the history of community organizing in the Mississippi Delta with youth who were disengaged from the region's past

- **Youth media**, evolving from one of the mini-grants in Phase I that successfully developed a youth-to-youth newsletter for Cleveland junior and senior high schools

- **Youth philanthropy**, which shifted from a focus in Phase I on funding any youth project in the community to a focus in Phase II on funding projects that specifically sought to strengthen youth voice

CYC Activities in Phase II

The CYC spent much of the first year of Phase II rebuilding and training a large new group of youth members, under the guidance of a new coordinator. Changes in the CYC's partner organizations also affected the board during Phase II. The superintendent was new to the district, so the CYC worked to build a partnership with him. The Chamber of Commerce also elected a new chairman, and therefore that relationship had to be reestablished as well. Additionally, the Boys and Girls Club, which had previously left the region, returned with a new unit director who expressed interest in collaborating with the CYC. One youth member said:

> *It was a rebuilding year. We had a lot of people who didn't fully understand what was going on, so they were just getting used to how things work on the board.*

During the second year of Phase II the board membership remained stable and as a result the board was able to focus more on implementation of their goals and campaigns. Compared to the first years of the initiative, there was a greater sense among youth that goals were accomplished in the second year of Phase II: "This year was a major year for us. Everything we set out to do, we did."

Training. Throughout the YIF initiative, CYC youth members received training locally and at off-site workshops and conferences. The board held a fall retreat, mostly for new

members to get acquainted with each other and the initiative. Topics of workshops attended by CYC youth included how to facilitate meetings, how to write grants, how to mentor and work with youth in the community, and strategies for civic action. Several youth also attended a grant-seeking and grant-writing conference in Jackson sponsored by the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service.

The off-site conferences were effective at providing not only training but also support and motivation for youth members. Because youth voice was new in Cleveland, the youth in the CYC needed encouragement to continue their pioneering efforts. Off-site conferences with youth from other areas that had more experience with youth voice provided more for the CYC members than just skill-building. One youth member explained the effect of the conferences:

> *It was a real stress-reliever because working in the community can get frustrating. And, it was good to see other youth out there trying to make a difference. It motivated me to keep working no matter how many times people close the door in your face.*

The coordinator explained that the conferences exposed youth to similar efforts in places outside of Cleveland, which was a unique opportunity for many youth:

> *As they graduate, some may not have thought about going to college and pursuing different careers and going to workshops helps, exposure to things are important.*

Youth governance activities. The CYC worked to established youth governance capacities within both the school district and Chamber of Commerce during Phase II. In each of these governance activities, the coordinator helped the youth initiate contact and then backed out as the youth took charge. Within the schools, the CYC piloted a Superintendent's Youth Advisory Council and a Principal's Advisory Council at Cleveland High School. The Principal's Advisory Committee met regularly once a month and worked on changing policies to provide a better youth experience in the schools, including changing policies about hallway traffic patterns and school breakfast. Because of the arrival of a new superintendent during the first year of Phase II, the Superintendent's Advisory Board first met in the second year, once in the fall and once in the spring, to discuss issues that included school parking and district-wide improvements.

One of the major successes of the CYC in Phase I was securing youth participation in the superintendent search process. The CYC youth wrote a letter to the head of the search committee asking for student representation, and as a result one student was involved in one of the interviews of the person who was eventually hired. Although it was only one meeting, the coordinator saw this as an opening for increased future involvement with the superintendent, noting, "The fact that they sat in on any is wonderful, because they had never done that before."

During Phase I, the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce had agreed to include youth representatives on selected committees. In Phase II, however, as a new chairman took over the lead of the Chamber of Commerce, youth were not involved in committee meetings, in part because most of the committees continued to meet during the day when students were in school. The coordinator explained some of the challenges:

Apparently, there were some issues with getting chairmen for the boards and the boards actually meeting, a constant problem. So we are still working on getting youth representation on committees.

Youth organizing. The young people involved in the CYC worked with the Delta Center for Culture and Learning to design and establish a course at Delta State University that would teach regional history and culture as a context for community organizing. Youth were involved in planning curriculum, recruiting students, and promoting community participation in the course. Delta State University offered a course entitled *Civil Rights Heritage in the Mississippi Delta* in spring 2006. It was open to both Delta State University students and dual-enrolled high school seniors. Seven dual-enrolled high school students took the class, as did a similar number of university students. The CYC urged that such courses would continue to be offered at the university in future years.

Youth media. Although it was not published, in Phase II CYC members worked with the editor of the local newspaper to write an editorial. The local newspaper, the *Cleveland News Leader*, had expressed interest in working with youth to create a consistent space for their voices in the paper. The youth planned to meet with *News Leader* staff to determine a format, such as letters to the editor, columns, articles, and graphic design. The youth feature was to become a regular publication every two or three months, as described by the editor. However, at the end of the second year of Phase II, youth had written material, but it had not yet been published in the paper.

Funding positive youth events. The external training opportunities and conferences inspired several events that the youth organized upon their return. A workshop in Jackson on civic action and a University of Michigan workshop on youth participation spurred the idea of a teen summit. CYC youth coordinated the summit by sending invitation letters to community leaders to join a panel discussion, which youth in the community attended. Among the topics discussed at the summit was the need for a youth center, which prompted continued efforts by the CYC.

CYC organized a number of stand-alone events to provide youth with positive recreational opportunities and to promote integration of youth from different high schools. The youth held two Study Jams and reported that these events were well attended, particularly the second event, which was organized just before state testing. The CYC also held a joint formal ball for students at both of the city's high schools. According to the coordinator, it was not a good fundraiser, but it did "provide the atmosphere of diversity that we're trying to work for." The board also sponsored a local theater group's series of plays on discrimination, racism, and diversity. After the plays were performed at both of the high schools, facilitators from the board and the theater group led discussions with the audiences. In partnership with the Center for Community and Economic Development at Delta State University, youth also focused efforts on organizing an event called the Race to Erase Racism, which sought to encourage interracial respect and friendships among youth and other community members.

The CYC also began a feasibility study for a youth center, with an initial goal of understanding the extent to which the community would support such a center. The CYC planned to explore the possibility of finding a new physical space for the council and other youth to meet and socialize. One youth member described a general sense of support:

> *Lots of people think we should have it because they have nowhere to go and because it would be a safe place.*

The coordinator reported progress on the feasibility study, although continuing efforts to advocate for a youth center were necessary:

> *One of the things that's been beneficial was that we had a teen conference with issues affecting youth, invited the mayor, a Bolivar County administrator, the superintendent. What came out of that was we found out who supported it.… It sparked a fire in CYC and other youth to go out in the community and have town hall meetings to invite the senator and business persons to help advocate and open doors we can't go through.*

Effects on Young People and Their Community

Effects on Youth

Increased sense of empowerment. Participation in the CYC demonstrated to youth that their role in the community was powerful and necessary. One young person described the role of youth in community organizing, which was learned through efforts to urge youth to attend the Teen Café. He said that trying to affect youth behavior was ineffective when pursued by school staff but was very effective when word was spread by fellow students:

> *Getting students to do something through a grown-up doesn't work. Youth listen more from other youth instead of adults.*

Another spoke about the important role of youth in arresting the transfer of prejudiced beliefs from parents to children. This youth in particular was inspired by the local theater production supported by the CYC:

> *It made kids want to bring about change…If adults want to think one way and act silly, they can, but we can change things.*

The coordinator also described the impact the CYC had on participating youth, especially on the way that they saw themselves and their roles in the community. The coordinator pointed to a greater sense of efficacy and engagement in the students over time:

> *I see that they are now much more excited about what they're doing. They didn't know that they could have a voice. When we had interviews, they all said it was a problem that people didn't listen. Now, they may see actual results from their efforts.*

Increased skills. Through their involvement in the CYC, young people learned to express themselves effectively. Youth members reported that they learned that, to be recognized and respected by adults, it is important to have a unified and organized voice. This lesson was learned not only through formal workshop trainings, but also through several years of experience in organizing events and initiating involvement in community governance:

> *I did a workshop my first year, and I learned that we as youth can't get adults to understand if we are bickering. So, we have to fix what's going on with us to show them what we want and present ourselves in a way to be taken seriously.*

> *Stay focused. Whatever [youth] want to accomplish, if they want something done, they will have to come together as one. Always a team effort. Everybody has one voice, so a lot can be said and puts a lot out there for people to think about.*

Another youth said how important it was to bring together like-minded youth who may not have otherwise found each other and organized themselves:

> *[CYC] Opened my eyes and made me respect my peers more. I thought I wanted to do a lot, but I didn't know there are lots of others who want to do the same thing and who want to make a difference just like I do.*

Youth board members, adult partners, and the coordinator agreed that youth had learned and developed very specific skills through their involvement with the CYC. Some of the skills they listed included grant-writing, reading proposals, and funding grants. Adult partners also noticed that youth had learned specific skills in community engagement:

> *They were able to have the opportunity to go out into the community; they were able to look at how you interact with leadership and get engaged. Those skills are being used…. They also learned how to build partnerships and how to collaborate.*

Increased sense of community. Several young people described developing a sense of awareness and commitment to their community and to Cleveland in general. CYC members noted that their involvement gave them a better sense of what was happening in their own community:

> *I'm more aware of things in the community. Before working with this group, I really had no way to know about doing this kind of work. Being with this group of people, makes it easy.*

> *Since I've been involved, it has made me more involved in the community and made me care more about what goes on.*

The CYC led some young people to want to stay in the area after they graduated from high school. One board member explained this change in her plans:

I think that, before CYC, I wanted to get away from here, but the CYC opened my eyes to what the community needs and made me want to come back. I still want to get away and see the world, but I want to come back.

I want to go to undergrad here but go to grad school somewhere else. I want to come back to do pro bono work or something like that in the community.

The CYC also led some youth to make connections between the history of civic engagement and their role in ensuring its continuance. One youth board member explained this awakening of civic awareness in youth, which he connected to the history of the Mississippi Delta's involvement in the civil rights era.

I see it as a way to get kids involved in something productive. I want my brother to do something like the CYC instead of sitting around playing games. The civil rights movement was people who were younger who were doing everything. It's not happening anymore. That is sort of a way to get the youth back involved in politics.

Effects on the Community

Increased community partnerships. The efforts of the CYC helped to build relationships between governance and educational organizations in the community. One adult partner noted that the CYC's web of partnerships helped several of the organizations to work better with each other:

One thing it started was the cooperation between the various agencies in the area, including the Center representing Delta State, the school district, the Bolívar Community Action Agency, and the Chamber of Commerce. I think these agencies have worked well together, and every one of them has worked with the Center on other projects.

Another adult partner commented that the CYC improved interactions between the schools in the area. This was accomplished through intentional representation of students from each of the public and private high schools in Cleveland. Adult members felt that this also encouraged students to become aware of disparities in education. Adult members described one conversation in particular between students about the differences between the chemistry classes offered at Cleveland High and at East Side High, which led to discussion of larger issues in the community.

Increased awareness of youth voice in the community. On several occasions, local media coverage of CYC events offered opportunities to publicize the goals of the youth board. The CYC, for example, received publicity in the local newspaper for a pre-Earth Day campus cleanup. Schools also provided an excellent medium for CYC to inform the community about its goals. Several youth members described how working through the schools was effective at creating change in the community, "When you get [social change] to the schools, you get to the community."

Almost all of the CYC's work was accomplished through intergenerational partnerships with adults in the community. These adult partners believed in the goal of youth empowerment and were willing to help youth develop their voice in a productive way. The newspaper editor described his first conversations with the coordinator, which sparked his involvement with the CYC youth:

> *We talked about the details of how to facilitate youth activism in the community without becoming the decision-maker and making the kids go into a certain direction, because that's what I believe…. We talked about how to develop young minds to encourage them to have their own opinions and their own voices. I liked these conversations and the idea of having thoughtful, idealistic kids in the community.*

The community's support for youth voice grew through CYC's involvement. Referring to youth roles in the various committees and boards, one of the high school principals described the positive impression the CYC youth were making on the community leadership:

> *This group has met with the Board of Aldermen when they brought the mini-grants. Those kids are impressing people at those meetings. These kids can talk about issues that affect the community…. They [adults] are seeing thinkers, problem solvers, people with ideas, and you can't beat that.*

An adult partner of the CYC noted that the board's work had exceeded many people's expectations:

> *I am guilty of having some stereotypes, too. They have blown them out of the water. I understand that there were limitations, but they have surprised everyone. I thought they wouldn't be interested in some things, but they don't find it boring and ask lots of questions. It amazes me…. They have a thirst for knowledge, and it's being encouraged. I'm really impressed, especially with the age level.*

CYC's record of engagement earned youth a voice with key figures in the community who saw them as valued constituents to involve in decision-making. The youth became a respected presence that could not be ignored in civic affairs in Cleveland, as demonstrated through the development of the Superintendent and Principal Advisory Councils and through initial talks about youth involvement with the Chamber of Commerce.

> *The superintendent has youth on an advisory board. I think that has been a great change. We're in an area where people believe youth should be seen and not heard. So, that's been a huge shift in organizational culture.… But, now youth are being involved on boards and on committees and helping to decide on things that affect the community. I haven't seen any resistance. It's just a transition period.*

This respect was earned in part because of the youth participants' demonstrated knowledge of civic issues in the community. One adult partner said, "[Youth] have provoked social change. People are coming to the table who haven't talked to us before."

An adult partner also said that in a recent local election, candidates made it a point to talk with the CYC youth:

> *When the politicians are campaigning, they are starting to campaign to the younger group. Last year, there was a city election, and the candidates came in and did interviews with the youth members. They are starting to understand that they do have some power and influence.*

However, the coordinator said that, while some people have come around to the idea of youth involvement, there are others who have not:

> *Our partners and agencies that we work with see that we have youth who want to be involved and have something to say and it can be informative for us to make the community better. There are the other adults who don't care one way or another. They have a mindset that we don't have to change, and we don't need youth to change it. That's a hard barrier to break through. It's mainly the older adults who don't get it. They just don't want to see change. The partners we work with are more receptive because they work with youth and are engaged in some way.*

Sustainability

At the end of Phase II, the structure for the continuation of the CYC was evolving with a positive result in sight. The coordinator, adult partners, and youth members were determined to find a way to continue the work of the council and to secure a site for a youth center. The coordinator said that, as a result of the ball that the board held earlier in the year, they had more requests for membership and were determined to continue the work of youth engagement:

> *We'll focus more on diversity for this next board. And, even if we don't have money, we'll meet at our house. We're not going to let things drop. Last year, we gave out applications for new members, but this year, we'll do an interview process.*

Despite its determination, the CYC confronted significant challenges to plans for sustainability. The most important challenge was gaining independence as an organization, both financially and physically, in order to establish a permanent presence in Cleveland, with independent funding and a stable, adequate location. Referring to efforts to secure its own space for a youth center, an adult partner explained the current progress of the CYC:

> *[A petition] was the first step in approaching government officials. We've been in several meetings and asked for city and county funding, and we've floated several proposals to keep the CYC afloat and get funding for the youth center. But, so far, we've been unsuccessful.*

The coordinator also commented on conflicting community priorities:

We still don't have a space. One of the things I found out was that the city isn't concerned about trying to get us a space. I met with the mayor, and he pretty much blew me off. Later, I went to a council meeting, and there I found out that he wanted to turn the city into a retirement community. I was very disappointed about that. We don't have too many people who are willing to help us get space.

Throughout Phase II, the board tried to obtain funding and establish itself as a 501(c)(3) organization separate from Delta State University's Center for Culture and Learning**.** Although the coordinator pursued pro bono legal assistance in establishing a non-profit under Mississippi state law, she also explored the temporary option of partnering with another non-profit while their own license was pursued. On the space issue, one option considered was to use space in a new community center built by a local church, although the location and affiliation might influence which youth would feel comfortable being involved in council activities.

The coordinator also reported discussions with the local chapter of the Boys & Girls Club about the possibility of becoming a program under the agency, which would then become the CYC's fiscal agent. The CYC would apply for funding under the agency and would receive funding when the club did. The site coordinator noted her concerns about maintaining autonomy under this option:

If we do this, are we going to lose our identity? No, we're not part of the national [agency], and whatever community says goes and will remain the same.

These questions were resolved, however, and the CYC decided to affiliate with the Boys & Girls Club.

One of the adult partners stressed the role of the partnerships in helping to make the CYC sustainable:

I believe that partnerships are the key. And, a lot of time we're afraid to ask because we might be turned down. Lots of people believe in youth and will support something that's youth led. It's about finding the right source and tapping into that source.

However, the coordinator found that, while business partners promised to support CYC's work, they were unable to do so. After a meeting with the city's political leaders, the board approached the business community but faced a lack of active help. The coordinator said that long-established local political relationships detracted from the support they got for their activities because it was difficult to propose change in a small town without jeopardizing these relationships. These issues included where the youth center would be located and who would fund it, both of which affected which youth would become involved. The coordinator explained, "If you're involved with the wrong person, you won't get support from the people who are opposed to him."

Securing sustainable funding sources was also a problem for the CYC. An adult partner expressed concern about the lack of available funds in a rural area like Cleveland:

When you're in a large metro area, you have more funding sources and people to draw from. For example in Chicago, you have people who could write a check for $10,000 and not worry about it. We don't have that here. Many charitable arms of industry restrict donations to the geographical limit around their headquarters. So, some organizations in other places could draw on that, but we can't. All of those are impediments to establishing an independent youth organization.

In addition, racism came up in many conversations as an obstacle. Besides having to consider racial balance in all CYC activities, there was a need to convince many people in the community that more racial integration was a desirable goal. The coordinator explained this need for careful consideration of racial diversity.

Definitely, you have to make sure that you have a diverse board. If you do a project on this side of town, the other side won't participate. That's one of our major challenges. We have to make sure it's in a central location. It's definitely important to be diverse and be seen together. People have to make that connection, so people see that it is diverse.

Lessons Learned

Youth and adults involved in the Cleveland Youth Council emphasized two major lessons learned during Phase II: the need for perseverance and the need to secure support. The coordinator explained her source of motivation for establishing youth voice in a region without a history of youth involvement:

Keep pushing – even when they say no, just know that you're fighting for a good cause and seeing impact on kids and how it's motivated them to do other things.

A youth board member explained the necessary connection between perseverance and support networks, which were a source of energy for continuing difficult efforts:

If you are passionate, keep pushing and get the support you need. It can be grown-ups to parents to other youth, but as long as you have support, you will be ok.

The continuing efforts of the youth, adults, and organizations involved in the CYC resulted in major progress toward their goal of creating youth voice in Cleveland. One youth board member expressed both the group's optimism about the progress made in an environment where youth voice did not previously exist but also group's frustration with the incomplete mission, as it stood at the end of Phase II:

We now have a lot of people on our side now, but things are still the same. We haven't accomplished our goals of full youth voice because there are still people who will say that we should sit down and be quiet.

May 2008 update, provided by AED:

4. Uth ACT — Hampton, Virginia

Implementation

Community Context

The city of Hampton is located in the southeast corner of Virginia along the Chesapeake Bay. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2006 city population estimate is 145,000, with 24 percent of the population under 18 years old. The Census Bureau reports that 47 percent of the Hampton population is black, 46 percent is white non-Hispanic, 3 percent is Hispanic and 2 percent is Asian. Hampton City Schools includes 23 elementary schools, six middle schools, and four high schools. During the 2006-07 school year, Hampton Schools served 21,500 students and employed almost 1,600 teachers.

Hampton had a long history of community support for youth civic engagement prior to the YIF. In 1993, the city council approved a Community Commitment to Youth, which affirmed:

> *All young people in Hampton are entitled to be seen, heard, and respected as citizens of the community. They deserve to be prepared, active participants in community service, government, public policy, or other decision-making that affects their lives and well-being.*

Four years later, in 1997, Hampton took this commitment a step further by establishing a Youth Commission. California's Institute for Local Government reports that this city-funded group consists of about two dozen high school students who have "a formal role in city planning and decision-making [through] participation on city boards, commissions, and advisory groups." As a result of this history, one adult partner of the youth board explained:

> *[There was already] a strong perception in Hampton [that youth were] actors of change in the community, [that they were] people with a voice that needed to be heard with decision-making.*

Establishment of the Youth Board in Phase I

In 2003, the Uth ACT board was established with Alternatives, Inc., a local youth development organization, serving as the lead agency. Alternatives partnered with several other experienced youth-related agencies to create a consortium of organizations to guide the youth board's development. These partners included the Hampton Coalition for Youth, InSync Partnerships (a partnership between the city and school district to create strong neighborhood schools and ensure success for all youth), the K-12 social studies department of Hampton City Schools, the United Way of Virginia Peninsula, and Hampton Parks and Recreation. The Hampton Youth Commission also served as an important partner in Phase I. In addition, Uth ACT created partnerships with school-based Youth Advisory Groups, which were helpful in

recruiting board members, and worked to cultivate a relationship with the local media in order to gain visibility.

During Phase I, the Uth ACT board participated in training and coalition-building activities. As part of their community-mapping activities, Uth ACT members engaged in survey administration and conducted focus groups and community interviews to identify issues for the board to address. Uth ACT also conducted activities to reach out to community youth in Phase I, including two rallies that drew over 400 youth and adults and a Social Change Conference in 2005. Following the YIF model, the Uth ACT board awarded mini-grants to youth to enable them to conduct social change projects. However, the board discovered that this grant work duplicated the efforts of the Hampton Youth Commission and decided to focus on other avenues of social change. One young person commented:

> *Instead of competing with that group…Uth ACT [should] focus on the other action pathways, becoming advocates and organizers to help the other groups in the city become proficient in their work.*

By the end of Phase I, Uth ACT had effectively laid the groundwork for its future campaigns by identifying high-priority issues and developing strong partnerships. Through their exploratory research and community-mapping, Uth ACT identified important issues for the youth of Hampton as well as new pathways to address those issues, allowing them to begin implementing their long-term vision without interfering with other youth groups in the city. A secondary result of this exploratory research was that the board developed a network of over 500 youth and adult allies within the community. The coordinator noted that, in Phase I, "Youth got an understanding of how systems work and became familiar with community issues." A Uth ACT member added:

> *It gave me the tools to see what's going on in the community and different power systems and identify them and be clearer on whom to go to…verified things I already knew but didn't really understand.*

Phase II Uth ACT Goals

In its 2005 impact plan, Uth ACT explained that its goal was to fill a gap in the infrastructure that encouraged youth to contribute to community life: "Uth ACT was established to 'cast a wider net,' increasing the pathways of service-learning and civic action in our city." At its inception, Uth ACT prioritized the development of a genuinely youth-led board, and sought to "form relationships with key adult and youth allies" to lay the groundwork for their long-term vision.

Uth ACT set out to accomplish this vision in Phase II through the following four campaigns:

- **Voice.** The goal of this campaign was to change the perception of young people as portrayed in media in order to increase civic involvement.

- **Visibility.** The goal was to formalize a youth-led coalition that was representative of diverse youth groups in the city and capable of creating change around youth and community issues.

- **Empowerment.** Uth ACT aimed to increase the role of young people in school policy and decision-making.

- **Capacity building.** Through this campaign, Uth ACT hoped to institutionalize service-learning as a district-wide instructional pedagogy.

Uth ACT Activities in Phase II

In Phase II, Uth ACT found its niche as a grassroots youth-advocacy organization. Uth ACT established three committees to address its campaigns in a directed manner: the Voice, Visibility, and Empowerment committees. Although youth were also involved to a certain extent in the capacity building campaign, the site coordinator and other adult partners played the key roles in efforts to institutionalize service-learning in Hampton. Youth committee members described the structure:

> *I think the idea was to divide and conquer; you have an outreach activism-type group, a policy group, and a media group and we thought that summed it up pretty well.*

> *I think that our mission statement has kind of changed. Of course, when we started off, we were doing youth philanthropy, and my understanding is just that [now] we have an empowerment group that is working more with policy and with adults.*

Building on the Phase I macro-level training in topics such as community dynamics (including training in power analysis and especially the identification of persons and groups able to influence policy and action within the community), training in Phase II was largely dictated by the practical necessities of the four campaigns. For example, youth working on the voice campaign attended a training session on how to research, write, and edit news and feature stories. Several young people also interacted with news media, and others spoke in front of city council, thus developing their communication skills.

Voice. As part of the voice campaign, Uth ACT created a magazine, *Word!*, with the goal of bringing youth-oriented issues to the attention of the community. To start the magazine, Uth ACT members recruited about 20 youth, mostly from a low-income housing development, to serve as writers, editors, and photographers. Members of Uth ACT's voice committee facilitated the magazine's creation, staffing, and publication. Youth wrote articles on issues important to the young people of Hampton, including articles on racial profiling, teen violence, and youth discrimination. A youth member explained:

The big goals for [Word!] are getting to the reader and changing people's views and getting them to do something. All of our articles have a sidebar about how to do something about this – here is how you get involved, here is who is doing something.

The first copy of *Word!*, which focused on racial profiling, was initially distributed electronically in spring 2006 to 500 people, according to the site coordinator. The second issue was twice as long, with military recruiting as the cover story. In April of 2007, the third issue was published on glossy magazine paper and was distributed throughout Hampton. This issue, labeled "Special Feature Issue: The Hampton Youth Opportunities Issue" discussed youth programs available in Hampton and included a one-page insert featuring information about 18 local youth programs, including Uth ACT, along with contact information for each. The third issue also used cover space to advertise for the visibility campaign's upcoming youth rally.

At the end of Phase II, the site coordinator commented that the group would like to see the magazine spin off into an independent entity:

[Word!] really seems like a social entrepreneurship process and not just a youth media project. So, we want to find out how do we start this as a business and make money off of the ads.

In addition to the magazine, the voice workgroup engaged in activities to increase media accountability on youth issues and increase youth awareness. The workgroup began to compile data on how the local *Daily Press* portrayed youth in its coverage. This effort was still ongoing at the end of Phase II, and aimed to reform the public's perception of youth and their ability to make civic contributions to the community.

We chose media because we thought that youth were affected by what is going on in the media, so we thought that, if we put something out there that was positive, it would counteract the negative.

Visibility. The visibility committee established itself as a strong independent offshoot of Uth ACT in Phase II, dubbed Youthink. The core group of young people and adults involved in Youthink focused their efforts on addressing youth discrimination in the workplace. According to the coordinator, Youthink was working with an adult facilitator to establish a more formal structure for the group, including bylaws and a mission statement. The coordinator also noted that Youthink attracted different youth than did other activities of Uth ACT. She explained:

Despite income level and race, Uth ACT is tops of the class, where some of the Youthink members are middle or bottom.

Through its visibility campaign, Uth ACT organized activities that involved the participation of youth and adults in the community. One of these events was a Speak-Out in the Hampton Career Café. The Career Café, a project of the Hampton Youth Commission and Peninsula Youth Force Development, is a storefront in a local mall with resources for youth to learn about job opportunities. Through this Speak-Out, Youthink was able to raise awareness of its goals among both youth and adults in the community.

Empowerment. The empowerment campaign focused on efforts to gain a student representative on the Hampton school board. As part of this campaign, young people met with the superintendent and assistant superintendent to present their case and gain their support for youth representation on the school board. A longer-term goal for the committee, according to the coordinator, was to push for more youth involvement beyond Hampton and into other cities and possibly even the state board of education.

As the campaign continued, however, local and school politics became an obstacle. The empowerment campaign faced the challenge of dealing with the political climate of Hampton. Youth were told that, before the superintendent would publically support the cause, they would need to write a proposal that was strong enough that the school board would agree to back it. The coordinator noted that the school board remained largely unresponsive:

> *[We had to start by] feeling out the situation and hearing about him and having him hear about us…we were pretty direct about [our goal of] having a young person represented on the school board.*
>
> *[The superintendent] didn't have enough support, so he dropped it…basically, he likes our ideas but he is not going to rock the boat.*

Even so, members of Uth ACT were also asked to participate in school district workshops and youth panels and were invited to charity and political events. Although they did not add a student representative, the school district made an effort to include Uth ACT in the political process by, according to the coordinator, "forming different groups for us to go to, and we added a new perspective."

Capacity building. The capacity building campaign focused on institutionalizing service-learning in Hampton schools. Although the adult partners took on the largest role in this task, Uth ACT members participated in presentations to the superintendent. One of the adult partners explained that, because the superintendent was not familiar with service-learning, the youth "put together a presentation that showed the differences between service-learning and community service, and emphasized the benefits of both." After this presentation, the principal asked the Uth ACT members to conduct a survey of students on the matter. The youth did this, and returned with results showing that "students overwhelmingly wanted service-learning opportunities through school."

As a result of these efforts, the social studies department of the Hampton schools agreed to use 2007-08 as a planning year to develop a service-learning curriculum. The intent, as described at the end of Phase II, was that service-learning would become a mandated part of the social studies curriculum for students in the eighth grade as of the 2008-09 school year and that a service-learning graduation requirement would eventually be adopted by the district.

Effects on Young People and Their Community

Effects on Youth

Sense of empowerment. The young people of Uth ACT reported a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for the Uth ACT campaigns, making it clear that they were eager to show that they were capable of dealing with issues that are usually only addressed by adults:

> *I think a lot of youth organizations have an allergy to talking about adult issues, and they think that youth can only talk about youth issues. I think that is a problem and youth should be able to create meaningful change and have discussions about life. I would like to see Uth ACT in the future as a place where people can go to find out how to make change.*

Many youth reported feeling not only more aware of the events in their community but also more empowered to change their surroundings. Through the activities conducted in the various campaigns, youth played a role in uncovering important local issues and planning a course of action to respond to them. Youth commented:

> *I used to just fuss at the TV about what was going on, but now I can do something about it. It helped me to be outspoken.*

> *[Uth ACT] made me look at my community in a different way, and I can do something to change the world.*

For some youth, Uth ACT's real benefit was that it gave them a concrete way by which they could contribute to their community. One young person who worked on *Word!* explained:

> *I have always been trying to do things in my community, but it's easier with a whole magazine and organization trying to back you up.*

Increased skills. Through their participation in the Uth ACT campaigns, young people learned practical skills, in addition to gaining community change experience. Training opportunities played an important part in skill-building.

> *I want to be the next Katie Couric, so I have to get some real speaking and writing and reporting skills and, of course, to make new friends.*

> *It has opened another door to me for future careers. Because I am starting to use media equipment, I am thinking of a career in that.*

> *For me, I wanted to be a "professional talker" and tell [others] how I feel about things but in a way that won't hurt anyone's feelings or seem racial.*

> *Before I wasn't as debating as I am now, but now I am more into it. If I have an opinion, I want to voice my opinion and interests.*

Additionally, since all of Uth ACT's work required young people to work in groups, they developed teamwork and interpersonal skills:

> *I learned more business skills and skills where you can succeed in corporate America, like what to wear and how to speak when you are talking to an adult.*

> *[I was] shy, but we started getting to know each other and getting more comfortable with the group. Now that we know each other, we are more involved in the community and I do more stuff. I just started joining groups here and there. It benefits you as a person.*

Sense of social justice. According to the coordinator, an underlying goal of Phase II was to develop among youth a "basic understanding that, if we are creating social change, we need to create social change for everyone and respect everyone in the group." This emphasis on developing a sense of social justice among Uth ACT members was evident in young people's reactions to their experiences.

The coordinator observed changes in the social consciousness of youth participants over the course of their time with Uth ACT. She recalled an example:

> *In the beginning of last year…a young person had been suspended for having a Mohawk [haircut], while most of the young people in our group can walk down the hall without a hall pass. They recognize this inequality, and now they say there is a problem with that and it should be equal. The average person thinks that there needs to be this equal representation of rights and less thinking about how it affects me. I have seen that movement from thinking about the individual to thinking about the group.*

Young people working on *Word!* also increased their awareness of issues related to social justice in the community:

> *I wrote an article on racial profiling and how that has been used by police trying to arrest people, mostly affiliated with drugs in local cities.… The Virginia Organizing Project was researching that and trying to figure out if there is racial profiling in Hampton and other areas in Virginia. People were studying how many people were pulled over, and I analyzed their results.*

> *I did an article on teenage violence by and against youth. I interviewed a cop and several people based on age and race and I went to cnn.com and looked at it and compared and contrasted the gay bashing or the homeless people getting beaten. I also wanted to see how much people knew about teen violence.*

Effects on the Community

Increased opportunities for youth. Uth ACT expanded Hampton's record of youth involvement by bringing youth voice into new areas of public life. The coordinator said that she

saw a change in perceptions of youth among organizations previously unexposed to youth involvement. For example, with regard to youth interaction with the Virginia Organizing Project, according to the coordinator, this was "the first time that they have interacted with young people, so that is a major change for that organization."

Youth reported that they saw changes in attitudes towards youth in their own schools. As one young person described:

> *I think I see it in school. Younger people know a lot more about the city and what is going on and maybe [we] increased their curiosity in what is going on…just having Youthink, the coalition, is extremely big evidence of change – faith, community, neighborhood, school, and government – just having five different sectors of people coming out is tremendous.*

Uth ACT provided community engagement experiences to youth who had not previously been involved in civic initiatives in Hampton. According to an adult partner, Uth Act attracted a segment of young people who hadn't been engaged in more traditional opportunities and broadened the perception of both what young people can do and who the young people are who want and can make a change.

Increased service-learning. Uth ACT fueled the integration of service-learning practice into the Hampton curriculum. The consortium, with the help of students in the capacity-building campaign, succeeded in implementing a service-learning curriculum in pilot classes in eighth grade. The consortium's five-year plan was to expand the pilot to high schools and, subsequently, institute a system-wide service-learning requirement for high school seniors.

Sustainability

Sustainability was a major concern for Uth ACT at the end of Phase II of the YIF initiative. According to a consortium partner, "[the youth] are concerned that once Kellogg's funding leaves, their project will leave." However, finding sources of funding in Hampton was proving to be a core challenge to the sustainability of Uth ACT. Despite the history of youth involvement in the city, consortium members lamented the lack of a local philanthropic base, which made private funding hard to attain.

The adults and young people involved in Uth ACT brainstormed a number of ideas to ensure the projects could continue without that funding, including the notion of breaking the group into several smaller entities. Their hope was that Youthink would become an independent 501(c)(3) organization that would operate separately from Alternatives, Inc., which receives funding from the school district. The coordinator expressed her concern at the youth-organizing work being tied to Alternatives without other funding sources, which might force the group to dilute its change agenda. Uth ACT was also exploring fundraising options to continue production of *Word!*, including selling subscriptions and charging for advertising space.

One of the things that made Uth ACT strong was living outside the government and feeling free to advocate for things the [Hampton Youth] Commission won't…[we] want to maintain the integrity of having one inside and outside system…[by] switching around funding locally with various funders.

The thing about voice that is really exciting is that it really seems like a social entrepreneurship process and not just a youth media project. So it is how do we start this as a business and make money off of the ads.

Lessons Learned

Finding a Unique Identity

The Hampton Uth ACT operated in the context of a community with a long history of youth and youth organizations having a voice in local affairs. While this meant that Uth ACT did not have to struggle to convince the community of the potential role of youth in civic action, it created a different dilemma for the group. In its first few years, Uth ACT underwent a number of iterations as it tried to carve a unique place for itself in a landscape of established youth organizations. In accordance with YIF expectations, Uth ACT was originally structured as a grant-making organization, despite the fact that the Hampton Youth Commission performed a similar function in the community. This led to a period of reorganization as Uth ACT members determined a new focus for the organization in Phase II, eventually re-emerging as a grassroots group focused on four campaigns that did not duplicate other efforts in the community — voice, visibility, empowerment, and capacity building.

The coordinator recommended:

Step back and look at what youth engagement currently exists…what's in place, where gaps exist… Through Kellogg work, we learned the concept of social action pathways…we knew but didn't understand terminology. We looked at each pathway and asked where these things are happening and looked at different sector groups and found out where civic engagement was happening (schools, churches, etc.) and were able to fill in holes, like youth media.

Remaining Focused

As Uth ACT grew in Phase II of the YIF initiative, it struggled structurally with the establishment of offshoot groups. The coordinator noted that, while the separate campaigns had been quite successful in coordinating their respective missions, they still had difficulty facilitating a sense of connection across all of the projects. One youth member suggested that the different projects could feel unruly at times:

I think [Uth ACT] should be focused on a couple of ideas, but if you try to do five or six or seven, you're not going to do that.

There were some indications that imperfect communication among the campaigns and groups led to a breakdown in group unity. The coordinator noted that no students were willing to take minutes of the campaign meetings, and thus were less able to communicate their activities to other youth members. In retrospect, while the "divide and conquer" method of organizing Uth ACT in Phase II of the initiative clearly led to tangible successes, additional efforts to establish the interconnectedness of the various committees could have enhanced their effectiveness even more. The coordinator explained:

> *[Youth have] really distanced feelings toward each other…[so] Youthink is nowhere near [Uth ACT] in terms of understanding the issues and being able to interact with each other.*

Negotiating Local Politics

Throughout the initiative, the youth and adults involved with Uth ACT were challenged by the political landscape of both the city and youth agencies as they sought to pursue their change agenda. The youth board also experienced some tension with its lead agency, Alternatives, Inc., because of the agency's commitment to other youth engagement programs. According to the coordinator:

> *It's my understanding that the [Kellogg] grant was given to the city and a consortium of partners and that the lead organization would offer the most support. But now Alternatives says that "this is our program" and they will do with it what they want. It's been frustrating for me and the youth. But Alternatives is aware of how youth feel, and they want to have a retreat to clear the air. Still, we need to say, "Uth Act can't exist without Alternatives, but this is how Uth Act needs to act." We need to dialog around that.*

The group faced similar challenges when starting fundraising to ensure the sustainability of Uth ACT. The lead agency discouraged the coordinator and young people from seeking corporate sponsors citywide because the agency was soliciting from the same philanthropic base.

Through their interactions with the school district and city agencies, youth learned about the challenges of navigating the somewhat mysterious world of local politics, and expressed a desire for additional training on how to approach and handle those issues. One youth said:

> *[I wish we'd been taught] the stuff we're not supposed to know, like who doesn't like who…let's say we present something to the school board of the city council, what are the real reasons that they won't pass it. Some of the people here know how the city works, and I think some of that knowledge would be helpful.*

May 2008 update, provided by AED:

5. Youth Innovation Board — Nashville, Tennessee

Implementation

Community Context

The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools serves 74,000 students in the city of Nashville and in the surrounding suburbs of Davidson County. Although the majority of the general population in metropolitan Nashville is white (65 percent white, according to the 2000 census), students attending Metro schools are 48 percent African-American, 35 percent white, and 13 percent Hispanic. Four of the county's 15 high schools are magnet schools, as are five of the district's 35 middle schools. Almost 18 percent of Nashville students attend private schools, a rate higher than the state or national average.

Youth activism in Nashville has a vivid history that includes large-scale, nonviolent protests of racial discrimination in the city. Beginning in 1958, local college students and others conducted sit-ins at lunch counters in downtown Nashville, gradually drawing an increasing number of protestors to the effort. In 1960, in the face of nonviolent student action, the city's political and business leaders decided to desegregate the city's lunch counters. The plan was implemented peacefully, and Nashville became the first major southern city to begin desegregating its public facilities. Although many more steps were needed by many parties to accomplish the basic goals of the civil rights movement in Nashville, the first steps were taken by the city's student community.

The Nashville Youth Innovation Board (YIB) was established in a city with a wide variety of existing opportunities for youth. Metropolitan Nashville has approximately 15 active youth boards, including a Mayor's Youth Council and four youth boards supported by the Oasis Center, a community-based youth-serving agency that also served as lead agency for the YIB. Several years ago, the Mayor's Office of Youth and Children began coordinating the youth board application process, so that the various youth boards could avoid drawing on the same small pool of students for leadership. The Mayor's Office also organizes a Youth Summit each year, attended by members of all of the youth boards in the city. Within the Metro Schools, however, opportunities for youth voice and youth leadership were limited. The one youth representative on the Board of Education does not have voting privileges, and there are no other formal mechanisms for students to provide input into district priorities and reform strategies.

Establishment of the Youth Board in Phase I

Under the guidance of the Oasis Center, the YIB strove to recruit the greatest possible diversity of membership — in gender, race and ethnicity, neighborhoods, and schools represented on the board. As a result, the board represented a wide range of the area's public and private high schools. The YIB looked for "people interested in community, people who want to be active in doing action-based work….We really stress authentic youth action and leadership." This emphasis on authentic youth leadership from the outset of the Youth Innovation Fund

initiative was instrumental in the successes of the YIB. Even as the board grappled with turnover of site coordinators in Phase I of the initiative, the youth members stepped up to take on leadership roles and guide their own meetings and work.

Solid youth leadership within YIB Nashville was reinforced by training focused on helping board members relate to each other.

> *We come from different economic backgrounds, different families. When you have different types of people, you need to create a space where people don't feel threatened. It was in training where we were able to break down these things, when you see where everyone comes from. We learned a different approach to conversations, then the work that you do is a whole lot more productive. It's always great to provide the space to diffuse what's going on in these groups.*

In addition to these developmental activities in Phase I, the YIB also engaged in the various activities prescribed by the national YIF model, including grant-making, community-mapping, and power analysis. These activities allowed the youth to gain an understanding of the local structures of Nashville and to begin to narrow their focus to issues important to young people in their community for the second phase of the initiative.

Phase II YIB Goals

In Phase II, the YIB chose to focus exclusively on the issue of school climate and school culture in Nashville's public high schools, as defined during strategic planning in Phase I. The primary goal of the YIB during this phase was "to engage high school students with other key stakeholder in the work of creating a positive and safe learning environment for all students."

In its Phase II impact plan, the YIB argued that youth voice and youth leadership in the Metro Nashville schools had been inadequate and therefore organized its work around three public campaigns:

- A **youth organizing** campaign aimed to engage youth in collective advocacy based on the result of a districtwide youth action research project. This campaign sought to mobilize youth as broadly as possible in research and follow-up advocacy, so that youth would be recognized as a viable stakeholder group in district decision-making and reform efforts, especially in the high schools.

- A **youth media** campaign aimed to "promote the voices and vision of young people in the public conversation about our schools." This campaign sought to engage youth in producing pictures, videos, and works that graphically portray Nashville high schools through the eyes of youth.

- A **youth philanthropy** campaign sought to institutionalize a youth-directed fund at a local foundation.

During Phase II, the YIB continued to collaborate with Metro Nashville Public Schools as well as two community-based organizations: Alignment Nashville and Students Taking a Right Stand (STARs). Alignment Nashville is an initiative created by the Nashville Chamber of Commerce to coordinate the efforts of community organizations and resources to support school improvement efforts in the Metro Nashville public schools. Members of the Oasis Center staff served on various Alignment Nashville task forces, including a task force on grades 9-12. This task force identified "creating a more caring school climate" as one of its top priorities. STARs is a non-profit organization that provides student assistance services (alcohol and drug abuse prevention programs, character education, and violence prevention programs) to students in 85 schools in the mid-Tennessee region. In Nashville, there is a STARs specialist housed in each of the district's comprehensive high schools.

YIB Activities in Phase II

In Phase II, the YIB continued operations with no major structural changes and with no changes in the lead partner or among consortium partners. However, the YIB narrowed its focus considerably as described, choosing to focus on school climate and culture in public high schools. The board's work was organized around the three campaigns, with each campaign carried out by a sub-committee of YIB members.

Youth organizing campaign. As part of this campaign, in September and October 2005, the YIB provided civic action training to approximately 150 youth from seven of Nashville's youth boards and councils. The goals of the training were to (1) give youth serving on boards and councils basic leadership and civic action skills and (2) enlist these youth in support of a citywide survey and advocacy campaign to identify what was needed to improve the learning environment in Nashville's high schools.

The centerpiece of the organizing campaign was an action research project on school climate designed and carried out by YIB members. In the fall of 2005, YIB members designed a survey, for administration to high school students districtwide, on the climate and culture of their schools. YIB members organized teams of student researchers to administer the survey in each of Nashville's 15 public high schools and, through this effort, collected 8,000 completed surveys. Throughout the spring of 2006, board members entered the data into a database, and an adult partner facilitated data analysis, providing the YIB with thick binders of school-by-school results.

In spring 2006, at a training organized for the Student Government Association and involving high school students from throughout the city, YIB members asked students questions about their school environment from the survey, and had students sort themselves into different corners of the room according to their answers. During this exercise, they noticed striking differences in responses from students in comprehensive high schools and in magnet schools, and decided that these differences should be a focus of their analysis. Board members then held focus groups with 30-40 students in each of seven Nashville high schools. In focus groups, students were asked if the survey data from their school did, in fact, represent conditions in their schools accurately. Data collected from these focus groups, together with the survey data,

became the basis for a report prepared by the YIB on school climate in Nashville's public high schools.

Titled *Separate and Unequal*, the report highlights differences in survey responses between students in magnet schools and students in regular comprehensive high schools. The YIB coordinator and his supervisor at Oasis drafted the report with support from YIB members, who participated in brainstorming sessions around the report's headlines and recommendations. The YIB engaged in varied activities to publicize the report's findings. In October 2006, they made three presentations to the school district leadership — to the superintendent and his staff, to the superintendent's cabinet, and to a meeting of all principals in the district. The YIB publicly released the report on Martin Luther King Day in January 2007. In March 2007, YIB members led a break-out session on the report and school equity as part of the Mayor's Youth Summit, an annual event attended by 300-400 youth.

The public release of *Separate and Unequal* also sparked considerable controversy and a negative reaction from the Metro Nashville Public Schools. The Metro North Public Schools did not receive a copy of the report before it was released, and there was disagreement about ownership of the data and the proper procedures for release. Oasis staff, intent on preserving the leadership role of youth in the project and on promoting youth voice, moved forward with plans for release at the Martin Luther King day event also without consulting or sharing an advance copy with the community partners who had sponsored the project — the schools, STARs, or Alignment Nashville. According to the STARs director, YIB coalition partners had been unprepared for the focus of the YIB report on the difference between magnet schools and comprehensive high schools.

A spokesman for the Metro Nashville Public Schools wrote an opinion piece for the newspaper criticizing the YIB report and the release of the survey data. His commentary questioned the right of the YIB to speak for Metro Nashville students, given that nearly half of the youth board members attended private schools. By the end of the 2006-07 school year, Metro Schools had taken no action in response to the report, had not engaged in any additional discussion with the YIB, and had made none of the policy changes recommended in the report. However, near the end of the 2006-07 school year, the district held a meeting for all school principals on the importance of personalization and relationship building with students. The YIB site coordinator noted that this emphasis on school climate and on relationships with students in the district's work with principals was entirely consistent with the themes raised by the YIB in its own research.

The YIB's campaign raised awareness of an issue and succeeded in generating significant publicity for the YIB's work, but it also strained key partnerships for the Oasis Center with the public schools and with Alignment Nashville, which dropped the Oasis Center's director from its steering committee. While this caused concern about the adult leadership of the YIB and about the continuation of strong partnerships with the schools and other local agencies, the youth members of the YIB saw the controversy as evidence of the value of their report in sparking discussion and change in Nashville:

The day after we released the report, when it was all over newspapers and TV, and after a few months later, we are still hearing things about education. What's actually going on in education is the new hot thing. That's a wonderful thing, now that it's started from what we did with our report. The whole fall-out from the report — you know if it's causing this much of a stir-up, there really has to be something good in the report. The stir-up was a tough process …. But at the end of the day, they have to respect what we were contributing. Those are not opinions in this report, they are statistics, facts, things that you cannot ignore. That's what made us feel safe at the end of the day. We weren't throwing facts up in the air. These are things that you can't ignore.

Following completion of data collection for this evaluation, Metro Schools and the Oasis Center met to make amends and look to the future. Their collaborative work is now back on track.

Some schools used the findings from *Separate and Unequal* as a springboard for projects to improve their school environment. One school implemented service-learning projects to teach tolerance among students. The STARs student executive council met with the YIB site coordinator to review their school site data. In response to that debriefing, the executive student council hosted a Mix It Up Day, in which students were rewarded with free dinner certificates and STARs t-shirts for reaching out to others at the school whom they did not know. The STARs director said that the principal and the STARs specialist at one school used the YIB data to plan the school's response to a student's tragic death, an incident that had sparked racial tensions within the school.

At the suggestion of one of the YIB's adult partners, the Chamber of Commerce included several youth boards, including the YIB, in its Citizens Panel review of the Metro Schools, the first time the Chamber had made an effort to reflect youth concerns and youth voice in its report. The release of the Citizens Panel report card in February of each year is a high-profile event in Nashville, attended by local politicians, candidates, staff from the U.S. Congressman's office, local business leaders, and the leadership of the Metro Nashville Public Schools. It is covered by the local newspapers and television stations.

In the fall of 2006, YIB members met twice with members of the Citizens Panel. In the first meeting, YIB members presented findings from their research project to the panel, followed by a question and answer session. In the second meeting, YIB members, along with Oasis Center members and STARs student representatives, met with the Citizens Panel over dinner to discuss their issues and concerns regarding the public schools, reflecting the increased visibility of the YIB and Oasis Center:

[YIB, and Oasis youth leaders more generally] are the youth voice for Nashville. The face of the voice is the YIB. Look at the Mayor's [Youth] Summit. They were very involved with establishing what that summit would look like. When people need youth, for any purpose, they know that this is where you go to find those youth that you are looking to be leaders. This is where you go in Nashville.

According to one of the authors of the Citizens Panel report card, the concerns and issues raised by youth in these sessions are woven throughout the Panel's report. The 2007 Citizens Panel report card focused on smaller learning environments in high school, college access, and college counseling. One of the report's authors argued that these recommendations are all a reflection of student voice and a direct reflection of the YIB's work: "You see a lot [in the report] about the social-emotional piece, being pushed on the high schools side. These recommendations are there in the voice of the high school students, those pieces exist in reform efforts that you see in the school district. I know you could say that the recommendations about college access policies that are in the report all came out of what we were hearing from the student voice."

Youth media campaign. The YIB media campaign, known as Culture Shock, was designed to support the advocacy efforts of the organizing campaign on school climate and school culture. During the 2005-06 school year, the YIB sponsored a contest in which they solicited photos, videos, poems, and essays from Nashville high school students depicting youth perceptions of the culture of their schools. YIB members designed and led a marketing campaign to promote the contest in area high schools. The contest received almost 70 entries, which were posted on teenedge.com, a youth-operated website sponsored by the Oasis Center. The YIB unveiled the winning entry at a heavily promoted event in April 2006 ("Pulse Day"), and the winning entry received a prize of $500.

According to some adult partners, some of the Culture Shock entries were controversial, including one photograph of a school principal depicted as Adolf Hitler. A school principal commented wryly, "They should have called that contest 'Principal Shock.'"

After the contest was over, YIB members mounted the entries in a traveling exhibit that was displayed in the youth section of the city's main public library. During the 2006-07 school year, the YIB ran the contest again, this time asking Nashville students to submit entries depicting their ideal school.

Youth philanthropy campaign. Because the YIB received less funding for their Phase II plans than originally anticipated, the YIB lacked the resources that they had hoped to set aside to establish a youth-run philanthropic fund. YIB members drafted an RFP for potential grantees but did not award any grants during Phase II of the project.

Effects on Young People and Their Community

Effects on Youth

In Phase II, the YIB coordinator reported that a key goal of the initiative was to build citizenship among the young people involved with the youth board. "[The YIB] builds awareness of the issues that affect them as citizens.… We want them to be able to be good citizens. They have to know what is going on in the community and to be aware of issues that affect them as citizens."

Increased leadership and communication skills. Through their meetings with Nashville public administrators, district officials, and other youth, the young people involved in YIB grew as leaders and developed communication and presentation skills, according to many participants and observers. One YIB member commented:

> *I gained a sense of being able to be a better leader. We all have qualities in us that we can all use better. All different people have different abilities and talents to sharpen up. [With the YIB], we found them out, and improved on them. [I've learned that] these are the things I need to work on. This place provided for that. It provided a warm environment, allowed for growth, allowed students to come here and feel safe, and to speak about issues concerning them.*

Youth board members reported that learning to represent their thinking and opinions in public had been one of the most important lessons learned from their experience on the YIB. As one youth board member put it:

> *When I interviewed [with the YIB], I was not the person to talk about anything. We all have opinions, but me speaking my opinions was one thing that I really shaped up on — not being afraid to voice an opinion on issues, on the issues affecting me. At the end of the day, education will affect students more than teachers or principals. All of these decisions are being made that affect us, and a lot of them we have no say in.*

Adult partners confirmed the increased visibility of youth as leaders in Nashville. A representative of the Nashville Chamber of Commerce and author of an annual report card on the Nashville schools described a YIB presentation:

> *Their presentation skills were off the chart. We had a 45 minute presentation from seven or eight members of the YIB. Without notes and without needing to refer to documents, except for the slide behind them, they could sit there and tell you what happened [in the data], and why it was happening. They would get into deeper descriptions of what the numbers meant, and what they had or hadn't analyzed. They could provide a conclusion if they thought there was a conclusion to be made, and they were comfortable leaving it open if they didn't know. It was a very good, professional presentation.*

Adult partners also commented on youth board members' ability to speak out for themselves:

> *These students know how to carry on conversations, how to speak out, even if they have a difference of opinion with the larger group. Even among their peers, they are comfortable providing an alternative viewpoint, that maybe others didn't believe in, and are willing to defend it.*

Increased sense of empowerment. Their experiences on the YIB allowed youth to become engaged in their schools and communities and to lobby for change and solutions in new ways. These experiences increased the sense of empowerment among youth about their ability to effect community change and serve as leaders in Nashville. According to adult partners:

It was empowering to see how the work they had done could generate so much attention from the city… There was a mayoral forum, and all of the candidates came out and spoke to youth issues. Almost all of the candidates referred to the statistics they found in the report. All of the candidates used their work to reference. It was empowering beyond belief for a person who has never been involved at this level. It was really authentic youth leadership.

What I've heard [youth] say is, "I realized that if something was going to get done, I had to do it. Things don't just happen, people do them. I might be one of those people."… Caring about their city and feeling connected to their city, seeing the city as a place that is malleable, you can have an impact on it, the nature of your community has something to do with what you personally do or don't do.

The young people of YIB were also inspired to continue their advocacy work outside of the confines of the board. For example, one YIB member described his efforts to develop a Youth Bill of Rights for Nashville. As part of this work, he, along with friends and YIB contacts, planned to conduct a survey of students, with items about expectations for their success and their sense of safety in school. He is also conducting focus groups. He had organized a small committee of students to draft the document, which he hoped to have completed by the following school year.

Increased awareness of social injustice. The YIB brought together Nashville youth from diverse neighborhoods and schools and exposed them to young people with varying backgrounds and experiences. The coordinator described:

[One youth board member] is six feet tall, a big Black kid, who goes to one of the urban high schools. [Another] comes from a very affluent neighborhood, drives a BMW. They are best friends. They always talk about how good it is to know each other. They don't have another opportunity to meet other people like they do at the YIB, they don't have a chance to meet people with different backgrounds. That's the biggest thing for the youth.

The action research project that culminated in the YIB's widely publicized *Separate and Unequal* report highlighted, for both young people and adults in Nashville, the differences in educational opportunities across schools. Youth were passionate about the importance of addressing the inequities that their report brought to life:

Pedro Garcia [the superintendent] is here working for us. The question is, does he know that? We need to let him know that we feel that we could be receiving a much better education than we are now. There is a big discrepancy [in student perceptions] between magnet and comprehensive high schools. I really saw that there was segregation in the education that people were receiving. It was totally not fair when you looked at it. Students here really see that, the inequity in expectations.

Adult partners also commented on the sophisticated understanding that the YIB members developed of the critical issues facing Nashville schools:

They were sitting down with the heavy hitters in town, and carrying on a conversation that was of substance, not just about asking someone to clean off the lockers at their school, but taking on much more of a leadership type of role, thinking critically about problems as opposed to taking a very dualistic approach. They could see the complexity [of the issues they were discussing].

Effects on the Community

Increased awareness of school inequities. The YIB's action research succeeded in raising awareness of school climate as an issue in the city's high schools. Local newspapers and television stations covered the public release of *Separate and Unequal* on Martin Luther King Day in January 2007. The local newspaper, *The Tennessean*, ran a front-page article in its Sunday edition on school quality and school equity. In addition, two YIB interns wrote commentaries for the newspaper's editorial page, echoing the themes in the report.

In 2007, the annual Mayor's Youth Summit focused exclusively on school equity. The YIB had worked with the Mayor's Office of Children and Youth to plan the agenda for the Youth Summit, and the YIB's work helped to influence the agenda for this public event. Also in spring 2007, candidates for mayor at a forum all referred to the issue of school equity, citing statistics from the YIB report.

Expanded opportunities for youth input. The release of the YIB report stimulated many new opportunities for youth input, as described above. Most notably, these included the YIB's consultation with the Citizens Panel of the Chamber of Commerce and the subsequent integration of YIB perspectives and findings into the Citizens Panel's 2007 report card.

Changes in youth-serving agencies. Although the Oasis Center had a long history of experience organizing youth boards, the approach of the national YIF and its focus on systems change opened up a new way of thinking about youth leadership opportunities:

This project pushed us in the direction of civic action and change work at a systems level, as opposed to youth volunteer service. This [project] gave us time and money to think about that and whether we want to do that. The project gave time and public attention for young people being more like change agents…it allowed us to work with youth in a way that outcomes for the community got more focus than they did before… We are a social service agency. We were moving in the direction of understanding that, if we don't try to change systems that impact our clients, nothing will get better for the young people and families that we work with. This project moved us in that direction — partnerships with young people to change systems.

Sustainability

At the end of Phase II, it was determined that the YIB itself would not continue beyond the 2006-07 school year and the end of the YIF grant. Oasis staff defined sustainability in terms

of its continued focus on youth leadership and youth advocacy, rather than in terms of the continued existence of the YIB. The Oasis Center planned to carry on the legacy of the YIB through the following projects, all of which grew directly out of the work of the YIB:

- Oasis will continue its youth leadership project, focusing specifically on issues related to school equity. Youth involved in the Oasis Community Impact board will continue their participation in the Citizens Panel report card.

- Oasis received a small grant from a local foundation to hire a staff person to support new service-learning leadership classes. Oasis will use YIB survey data to design student-designed interventions to improve the culture and climate of schools. This program is a collaboration with Metro schools and Alignment Nashville.

In addition, the Metro Nashville Public Schools planned to expand leadership classes for sophomores, as piloted in two high schools in 2006-07, to all high schools in 2007-08. Oasis staff described these classes as an important legacy and continuation of the work of the YIB.

Lessons Learned

Framing Issues for Youth and Adult Audiences

The YIB recruited students from both public and private schools in the metropolitan Nashville area, with the intention of creating as much diversity as possible on the board. However, the board eventually focused on an issue — safety and learning climate in the public schools — that did not directly affect about half of the YIB members. This experience caused Oasis leadership to reflect that, in future initiatives, it would be more effective to recruit young people who have a common experience relative to the issue under consideration:

> *In the future, when we want young people to do advocacy in a public way, the group of youth needs to be a group that is united by some common experience of oppression, or a problem or a problem that they all really own. For example, they all live in a neighborhood where this problem exists, or they all go to failing public high schools…. In terms of advocacy, people have so much to learn, and if you add to it that there's a whole group of students who don't understand the problem at all, that makes it more difficult.*

For the agency overseeing the work of the youth board, the implications of raising sensitive issues are particularly salient and can have a lasting effect on the organization, beyond the scope of the responsibilities of youth advocates. For example, the tension introduced by the *Separate and Unequal* report in the relationship between the Oasis Center and the school district had potential negative effects on the work of the Center:

> *We are insiders. We have staff who work in schools all the time, we have a hard time meeting commitments to other funders if we have no access to public school students.*

Can we organize a rally against school policy? Don't think so. Are we going to do direct action in a way that jeopardizes whole agency relationship with schools? We are not, might support someone's else doing that. We didn't know that the YIB report would have the effect it did. Our board said full speed ahead, out of ignorance. None of us knew what could happen when we said we are going to work for change. These are one of the things that could happen, and we will be savvier in the way we will work in the future.

Balancing Youth and Adult Roles

The YIB experience highlighted potential tensions between the youth agenda and the "adult" or "agency" agenda in conducting youth-led social change. In Nashville, youth took on an issue that they had identified as important and took on the advocacy task in a way that made sense to them. However, the process strained some of the institutional partnerships that Oasis depends on to do its work. Oasis staff reflected that negotiating this tension can be tricky:

[At times] youth voice is more powerful, needs to be in front, at other times the adults are more in front, it's not either/or, it's a both/and.… There are some things where institutional decisions are important, we help young people understand those if they don't like them. They don't have all the say, we don't have all the say. You need to emphasize youth leadership and youth voice — that's what has to be emphasized, because most people don't listen to youth at all. But they don't get to make all decisions — we are doing an inter-generational partnership.

In a youth-adult partnership, you are saying that the youth are going to do something. That doesn't mean the adults are hands-off, though. It's people working together, some of whom are older, and some of whom are younger. In almost any setting, like in a school, young people have the least formal power and the least general preparation for making change. You have to be real about that. We don't expect younger people to do things that adults have not been willing to do, or won't do. Let's get real. You can't just send a youth in there. You need to understand the system, how to connect with people.

May 2008 update, provided by AED:

6. YOUTHINK — Portland, Maine

Implementation

Community Context

The largest and most diverse city in Maine, Portland has a population of roughly 65,000 residents. Portland is one of the largest foreign shipping ports in the country, which provides a substantial base for the local economy, although the economy is becoming increasingly oriented to the service sector. Several large financial service corporations have moved to Portland in the past 20 years, and these businesses have brought new professional jobs to the economy. On average, incomes in and around the Portland area are higher and the unemployment rate is lower than in most other areas of the state.

Portland's public school system is the largest and most diverse in the state. According to the 2000 U.S. Census data, Portland had a population of 12,072 residents under the age of 18. While the most diverse city in the state, Portland's under-18 population is more than 83 percent white, 6 percent Asian American, 5 percent African American, and an additional 5 percent who identifies as "other."

The Portland Public Schools has a tradition of service-learning in the classroom. However, prior to the YIF initiative and the establishment of YOUTHINK, there were few structured opportunities for youth engagement in Portland, particularly related to education. Before YOUTHINK, the primary youth-engagement opportunity was a youth advisory board to the city council. According to the coordinator:

> *Students are having very little say in the educational system, and we want to help change the climate so that everyone's voice is appreciated.*

Youth who joined YOUTHINK at the start of Phase I agreed that the opportunity for youth to participate in activities that could really change their community was new in their town. Youth were eager to have their voice heard and to affect their own surroundings positively. One young person said, "I never had anything like this before and always wanted to be involved and take an active role." Another noted:

> *This was an opportunity to get youth voice in the community. In Portland, we aren't given a chance to participate and speak our mind and get involved with decisions that affect us.*

Establishment of the Youth Board in Phase I

During Phase I, YOUTHINK focused its efforts on recruiting a core group of youth members who brought diverse backgrounds and experiences to the board. The coordinator noted that it was difficult to recruit from certain disadvantaged groups:

Portland has huge populations of refugees, homeless, and sexual-orientation minorities. They take a long time to make connections with. So, we chose to fill only two thirds of our spots [initially] and fill them with [traditional] youth leaders.

For a student who doesn't have to work, the only cost is time. But for someone who has to work to support their family, the cost is food or shelter. We haven't found a way to get around that. Some on the board have to work, and they just don't have the time.

YOUTHINK established a consortium of partner organizations that were youth driven and that provided expertise in a variety of areas to help guide the work of the new board. These organizations included Blunt Youth Radio, the Portland Partnership (a local education fund), KIDS Consortium, Portland Public Schools, and the Portland United Way. The coordinator commented that her role was to bring the coalition together to build on the talents of each partner:

I'm a coalition builder connecting with other people in the community, an advocate for youth voice and service-learning, a trainer, team builder, youth organizer, project administrator (for the day-to-day details), and a vision caster, a person who has a framework to what we're heading for. I try to channel their experience into opportunities to share with the rest of the board and help them to negotiate the youth-adult dynamics of empowering.

Aligned with the YIF model, the early activities of YOUTHINK helped board members become familiar with issues facing Portland youth, garner support for the role of youth in their communities, and begin building the skills necessary to form a strong organization. Through community-mapping activities and focus groups, youth identified five issues to pursue: housing, economy, diversity, transportation, and education. The board granted funds to middle school and high school youth to conduct social change efforts addressing those issues and also hosted and organized Maine's first youth philanthropy conference, entitled "New Voices in Social Change: Maine's Youth Philanthropists Speak Up!" The coordinator said that these research-oriented activities prepared the young people of YOUTHINK to be effective leaders in their community:

It gave them grounding in the young people in the city. They ended up with a spreadsheet with data. They sorted out the issues and came back to the board and made priorities. They got a sense of ownership and now they are equipped to provide good technical assistance, and they set themselves up for not having a lot of problems they could have had by understanding the value of good research.

An adult partner also reported that she saw evidence of this learning:

In the community-mapping process, they learned a lot about affordable housing. One issue was that landlords were charging too much. After their research, they knew about property taxes, maintenance costs, and so forth. Now they understand the depth of social issues and the complexity of the problems. That way, they can come to solutions.

Phase II YOUTHINK Goals

YOUTHINK's Phase II activities were an extension of the lessons learned through the community-mapping and power-analysis work of Phase I. In its impact plan, YOUTHINK emphasized that, because Portland is a small city, the group hoped to continue with their Phase I work to establish credibility as an organization that would stay "true to their word." In Phase II, YOUTHINK designed the following campaigns, with the overall aim of supporting youth voice and youth action on community issues:

- **Youth-to-youth grantmaking.** Through this campaign, YOUTHINK aimed to create a sustainable structure for youth philanthropy in Portland by developing a unique curriculum and training materials. YOUTHINK also planned to develop a statewide network of youth philanthropists with a social change focus and to use its grantmaking to advocate for greater youth-led action on local issues.

- **Service-learning/civic action.** In this campaign, YOUTHINK planned to partner with Portland's Service-Learning Leadership Team to build awareness of youth-driven civic action projects, offer relevant training, and bring attention to service-learning and youth-directed civic action through the YOUTHINK website and local media.

- **Media accountability and activism.** YOUTHINK proposed to embark on an audit of the local print media's coverage of young people in Portland and to present these audit results to the community, in order to identify the strengths and challenges in how young people are portrayed in the media. In addition, YOUTHINK planned to support Blunt Youth Radio's goal of using media as a vehicle for creating change in disempowered neighborhoods.

- **Advocacy for student voice.** In this campaign, YOUTHINK planned to research the most effective next step to institutionalize youth voice in policymaking in Portland and to advocate making this inclusion of youth voice a reality.

YOUTHINK Activities in Phase II

Youth-to-youth grantmaking. Based on their experiences in Phase I, YOUTHINK worked to improve its approach to youth-to-youth grant making, in part by offering pre-application training for potential grantees. YOUTHINK also transformed its RFP to assist applicants in describing key pieces of their proposed projects. According to the coordinator:

> *The RFP actually got a pretty heavy makeover this year based on people's feedback. In the RFP, we were asking people to tell us about their project, many times for the first time. We changed it so that it was more of a worksheet, so that they could develop their project as they filled it out, and the worksheet would help them. We also realized that we should have community training to help students create a good plan.*

Youth members agreed:

Before we picked grants or had people write to us, we did a lot of educating by teaching kids what we were looking for. After giving out the grants, we have still been doing technical assistance on an as-needed approach. We really want to be more proactive this year to avoid the questions that came up last year.

Through its grant-making efforts, YOUTHINK increasingly established itself as a source of funding and empowerment for other youth. Respondents said that YOUTHINK's work to directly empower youth has helped other young people in the area to feel as though they are able to affect change.

The board has been really successful, in terms of grant-making and becoming known as a youth-led organization. They have been really good in getting youth to think that they can effect change. Just the fact that we've given out $18,000 in Portland has given us some credibility and recognition.

Service-learning and civic action. In Phase II, YOUTHINK advocated for a more formal structure in the Portland Public Schools that would allow high school students to earn elective credits for participating in service-learning. YOUTHINK developed a proposal for a civic action curriculum in schools, which was presented to the district, although no immediate action was taken:

The education curriculum was drafted in January, and we presented it to the superintendent and principals, many of whom were really excited about it. Nothing has really moved forward since we have done this presentation. The teacher representative has said that the teachers' salaries could be paid out of his budget.

Media accountability and activism. In Phase II, YOUTHINK worked to change the way that young people are represented by major media sources and also promoted and created youth-driven radio programming. The board successfully garnered attention for its work from the local media which, in turn, generated more positive representations of youth in the local press:

We continue to have some really strong relationships with reporters at the local newspapers. We have a reputation for getting the best coverage in town. There is always an article in the paper when we do something, and we have had about four or five this year. We are working this summer to create a more systematic way to build these relationships.

YOUTHINK also engaged in an intensive action research "media watchdog" project to analyze the way in which young people were portrayed in the local media, and presented their results to local leaders and press. The YOUTHINK analysis highlighted several trends, including: (1) no youth were quoted in education articles in the *Portland Press Herald* during the period of YOUTHINK's study; (2) there was 300 percent more coverage of youth athletics

than of education; and (3) the youth perspective was included in less than 6 percent of articles, although youth make up 20 percent of Portland's population.

> *We talked about the local news in Portland and what is reality concerning … young people in Portland. A lot of that conversation revolved around race, class, and immigration status. We talked about media bias and the relationships between media, public opinion, and policy.*

Through a partnership with Blunt Youth Radio, a recording site for youth was set up at a neighborhood center in one of the most multi-ethnic areas in Maine. The coordinator explained that this location was intentionally selected because YOUTHINK hoped to attract more under-represented youth to the radio project:

> *Actually, that [engaging low-income and language-minority youth] was the whole reason for our partnership [with Blunt] in the first place. Empowering disadvantaged youth is not part of their charter, but we wanted to impact the new refugee and immigrant cultures. We realized that asking children to come out of their communities and engage in the dominant culture, that is tough. We thought by bringing them together in their communities, we might be able to get around this. I think that one way that YOUTHINK has been successful is that Blunt does see this as part of its mission now – to engage low-income youth.*

An adult partner from Blunt Youth Radio agreed that this new partnership helped the station shift its goals and to encourage youth of different backgrounds to participate:

> *We have been trying to reach out with youth that don't usually respond to a flyer, or those students who are usually pretty highly achieving. Portland has a growing community of people who are immigrants and a more diverse group. We have had trouble getting them in here. There was a culture here at WMPG that was not very inclusive. The nature of our mission didn't always include them. The message that we want to give to young people is that they can reach out to the community at the same time as talking about issues of class and power. Working with [the coordinator] at YOUTHINK offered us an opportunity to reach out to all of the community.*

Advocacy for student voice. In Phase I, YOUTHINK members successfully advocated before the Portland School Committee to include student representation on the committee, in order to provide youth with a voice in education policy decisions. The Portland School Committee now has three non-voting student members who attend every meeting. An adult partner said that the Committee may consider giving the youth positions a vote, though the matter would have to be approved by the city council.

> *I am huge supporter of taking the school outside the walls and vice versa. I think that YOUTHINK can make it easier for us, and we can make it easier for them. That would be my challenge to them – ramp it up. Have some deliberate urgency. Our schools need their input.*

I know there has been some chatter to see if we can change the charter to give the students a vote. There is some support on the school committee, but the city council would have to vote for it, and that would take a real year-long movement to build up the right amount of public support.

The superintendent also commented that she would generally support efforts to give youth more voice in the direction of their schools:

I think that the more that our students are able to get into these discussions about YOUTHINK, they will understand that the world is at their fingertips and that we share the same issues. The more that we can infiltrate classrooms, the better it will be.

I think that the key to the success here was that it was good soil. It fell on a very natural garden and it has grown well. You have to have everybody on board – the powerful people. You have to have the superintendent's belief that this is the right thing to do. I think [the coordinator] would say that this office has been very supportive. There also has to be a comfort level with having them figure it out, and knowing that they will figure it out – both the kids and the people you hire.

At the end of Phase II, the Portland School Committee was considering adopting the service-learning requirement introduced by YOUTHINK. YOUTHINK believed that one way to permanently encourage youth activism would be to require service-learning for all students. A school committee member explained that this idea was beginning to get serious attention from the board:

Another impact is that the Committee is considering a service-learning requirement for graduation. That's great timing because the state will be issuing new graduation requirements. And we're also trying to get an elective service-learning, youth-philanthropy course at one of the high schools.

Effects on Young People and Their Community

Effects on Youth

Community awareness and empowerment. Through their involvement with YOUTHINK, young people in Portland developed a greater awareness of the important issues facing their community and an increased sense of their power to make changes. Youth reported:

I didn't really know about the problems in the community. YOUTHINK opened my eyes to all of the different problems that are going on in Portland, especially those related to youth.

To empower youth and to make youth believe that they have power – to arm them with the power that they already have and to encourage them to exercise that power and not

accept things at face value. I think it's a reasonable goal for humanity at large, and it's great that we can start that kind of thing here.

Adult partners agreed that they had witnessed a transformation from youth feeling unaware of what was happening in communities around them to being both aware and able to change what they saw:

The whole board, however, is constantly saying that they never realized they could do these things or that this work was out there. They are also saying that they want to do something involved with social change. They see youth apathy as a real issue. One of the reasons for that is that there is discrimination against youth and a poor public image. They are now very aware of policies involving young people and the ramifications of public debate.

It's been amazing to see the students' growth, especially in terms of their self-confidence to speak out and be heard. And, people really do listen. We're a small community and a small state so when six youth call city council and when 20 people e-mail a legislator, it's a big thing. We have way too many uninformed opinions in this city and state... Through this process, our youth have become informed citizens.

I think that these kids operate under the premise that they should not only be an active participant in society but also that they should create that society and totally change the landscape. I feel like that is a huge difference from other youth groups that I have worked with. That difference seems to be really strong with all the events I have attended.

Adults also predicted that the awareness youth gained through participation in YOUTHINK would lead to their continued civic engagement:

Many want to be involved as a public official or philanthropist or non-profit director. The correlation between this has been really well established on our board. Also, they express more of a desire to stay in the state of Maine. This is a really pressing issue, it is the most grey state in the nation…folks keep moving here to retire and youth leave. It is our strong belief that connecting young people makes them more likely to feel connected and come back.

There is a parent whose daughter and son are on the board. And her daughter is presenting today about educational equity. She wants to go into non-profit management. She is the most striking example of how YOUTHINK has shaped her aspirations.

Increased skills. Through the activities they engaged in and the associated trainings in public speaking, advocacy, and media, the young people of YOUTHINK gained concrete skills that would help them in many areas of their lives, including leadership and teamwork skills. They stated:

I think that a big part of what I learned was group dynamics and working toward a consensus. I went to a lot of really, really slow consensus meetings. The stuff that we do in YOUTHINK is really exhilarating. [The coordinator] is a great facilitator. And the way that the projects are designed – I think it is great that they all work together and have us pushing forward.

I do feel more comfortable talking to people in power. Now I talk to community members in power all the time and speak to them in a way where they will listen.

Adults also commented on the communication and leadership capabilities that youth were developing:

I think that the kids are taking over leadership roles. I think that teachers are beginning to recognize that these kids are making a difference. It's still a new concept for some people. It's still a young program, but it is very powerful for the students involved.

In terms of skills, students come away with more confidence, especially in public-speaking skills and more confidence in having hard conversations…especially in June when the board was pressed by the editor of the paper not to take a report public. Youth on the board were respectful and stood their ground, [they said] "We understand your position but it wouldn't be truthful to the community if we didn't take this public." [They stood their ground] in a room full of editors and reporters.

Effects on the Community

Youth as resources in the community. The work of YOUTHINK, particularly around the media project, highlighted the valuable role that youth can play in the community and raised the awareness of youth issues. YOUTHINK effectively promoted its work and, in turn, was increasingly called on to serve as a representative of youth voice in Portland. Adult partners said:

The initiative has had a significant impact especially with the local media. Now, students are being asked about their opinions because the media know that the youth are more informed. They always call us to get students to quote. They haven't yet built their network so they call us, and that's a good start.

What got me exposed to YOUTHINK was their promotion. I think that is so important. You can't go a few months of reading a newspaper without seeing an article. They are putting the word out there and letting people know. I think that, in my mind, the way in which they go about doing their work and making it public is key. I think YOUTHINK is out there. I bet one out of every five adults you stopped on the street would know about it. It's got a wonderful reputation.

In areas of the city that are service-based and community-based, they are more well-known. If I were to take a look at the city itself, the average person would not have heard of them. To policymakers within education, they are very well known. I know that they

are well known but not as well known at the city council. And [the coordinator] has been very smart about who needs to know about YOUTHINK. That has been one of the things that she does exceptionally well. She's done a very good job kind of knitting together a network.

The coordinator added:

Our reach is not universal. [But] Among people who are familiar with young people and youth issues – as well as community leaders – we are really beginning to be seen as the leaders of youth-led initiatives. We get a lot of requests to be the young people who speak at a certain event. People don't see us as being pushy but rather as assertive. They do see us as radical but in a good way. Among those who know of us, there is a really good perception. Also, everyone that works with the students is surprised at the students.

The coordinator went on to say that, while the group is largely well regarded, there has been some resistance to the work of YOUTHINK in the community. She said that, while some people have been supportive, others have been less interested in giving more power to the voice of youth.

They vary. People are generally pro-youth but tend to underestimate and condescend to them. So that when it comes to putting those beliefs to the test with actions, Portland is not as progressive as it makes itself out to be... There is kind of an old Portland and a new Portland. There are some people where they don't want students to have non-traditional power, which is one reason that we want to move toward a referendum in a presidential election year.

Increased youth voice. As described previously, YOUTHINK achieved major successes in directing attention to the importance of youth voice, especially in the school systems. In particular, YOUTHINK's work led to the representation of students on the Portland School Committee, an increased interest on the part of the superintendent in giving youth more voice in the direction of the schools, and progress in requiring service-learning in every Portland student's education.

Sustainability

At the end of Phase II, the coordinator said that she was looking into incorporating YOUTHINK as a 501(c)(3) organization. She noted that she believed that it was in the best interest of YOUTHINK to not become enveloped by another, larger organization but instead to continue to operate independently.

Portland is a small enough city where there aren't organizations that have the same mission as YOUTHINK. A plan has been to incubate here for a few more years and do more things to strengthen Portland schools. We're really looking to establish a service-learning elective and to support youth philanthropy, so that students who can't

participate in after-school activities are able to have some of these service experiences – and YOUTHINK can do the training.

Lessons Learned

Building a Diverse Network of Youth

Despite efforts to actively recruit and retain underrepresented youth on the board, YOUTHINK struggled to engage low-income students and students of color. The coordinator said that including students who are recent immigrants has been a particular challenge. Through their recruitment efforts, YOUTHINK had become increasingly aware of the importance of taking cultural differences and expectations into account:

It's been hard to get some students to come, particularly the younger Muslim women and during the month of Ramadan. They are expected to spend more time at home. I think that is true for a lot of the folks from newer immigrant families, especially Sudanese, Somali, and Cambodian.

There are few cultures as meeting-driven as Americans, which requires a lot of energy in educating students' families from other cultures on why committing to YOUTHINK is valuable in light of their many home and school responsibilities.

Adult partners noted that over the course of the initiative, YOUTHINK's effort to include under-represented youth has been increasingly successful, especially those efforts that have come through the media work.

They targeted a couple of middle schools, so there is one of them on the board this year. There wasn't as much school diversity as we would like, so then we brought on some more people in August from other neighborhoods and language groups that we didn't have in the original group. I think that has been key to us fulfilling the initial vision of this work to have under-represented students become effectively engaged. They have, in turn, reached out to people in their circle of influence and created change at that level.

Creating Opportunities for Authentic Youth Leadership

Establishing genuine youth leadership within the organization was a difficult task, but YOUTHINK was able to develop a sense of ownership on the part of youth and to encourage them to lead. Ensuring that activities and partnerships were youth-initiated and youth-driven was sometimes a challenge. The coordinator reported that honing YOUTHINK's capacity to encourage truly youth-driven work took longer than expected due to the need to ensure that youth were properly prepared to lead. Adult partners also noted:

We're still struggling with meeting deadlines and having the outcomes we want while getting youth to make it happen. We have an adult idea and we're telling kids to

implement it. It's difficult. It would be easier if we were to set our own agenda and timeline... How much do adults get involved? If we just step back and let the kids do it, would we meet our deadlines?

We're focused and have a good energy with the youth. Everybody on the board has a sense of purpose and an understanding of the work they need to do. But it took a long time to do because youth are accustomed to having adults tell them what to do, especially in school. So for them to take ownership, they have to have a better understanding of everything.

It's challenging me to think of youth-adult relationships in a different way. I realized how stifling the traditional style of communication to youth can be. It can be challenging to try to tone it down and let them make mistakes, like having inefficient meetings. As an adult member, it's an interesting position. I try to enhance what's going on instead of create what's going on. It's difficult, but it's something I strive for. I also see it as an opportunity to use my connections with other organizations to bring in expertise that the board doesn't have.

However, by the end of Phase II, both adults and youth commented that one big accomplishment was the extent to which youth were able to take on meaningful leadership roles. "They [adults] don't try to overpower us. We feel like we're on the same level as they are." Another youth said:

They learned more about what kids think about and how much we want to be involved. They've seen a lot more of our perspectives.

Adult partners also commented on the value of youth leadership on the board:

Working with the young people was rewarding. Also, hearing how they feel like they have grown and seeing them get excited. They know they are pioneers and they realize they are setting the stage for something big. It's great to see them work so hard after school and take it so seriously and take a leadership role. They led a grant workshop two weeks ago, and I just sat back and watched.

A lot of these kids are already doers, but some are middle of the road. They feel more powerful, and they feel more confident and interested in what's going on. The youth see everything differently, and that's what's great about it. Sometimes I feel like I know the answer, and then the kids see it so differently. Adults are blown away about how youth think about issues. This is definitely the youth's board. We know this is a different model, and that's why this is exciting. Sometimes you get challenged in a good way.

May 2008 update, provided by AED:

7. Youth Innovation Fund for Education — Portland, Oregon

Implementation

Community Context

The Youth Innovation Fund for Education (YIFE) board was formed in Portland, Oregon, a city with varied opportunities for youth engagement and with a mayor who had a strong interest in increasing youth voice and involvement in community affairs. The board recruited primarily students from the Portland Public Schools (PPS) to participate in YIFE-sponsored activities. At the start of Phase I in the 2003-04 school year, PPS served 49,000 students in 85 schools. Fifty-nine percent of the student population was white, 16 percent African-American, 12 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent Asian.

Prior to formation of the YIFE board, the school district offered two mechanisms for incorporating student voice into decision-making structures: (1) the Superintendent Student Advisory Committee (SuperSAC), which provided a channel for youth voice to be heard on school policy decisions, and (2) youth representation on the PPS school board. Although the youth member does not have a voting membership on the school board, PPS has made a concerted effort to include youth voice in its governance structure. In addition, Multnomah County had a long-standing and active Youth Commission.

Over approximately the same time frame as the YIF initiative, the mayor of Portland also launched a separate initiative related to the role of youth in government. According to the Manager of Neighborhoods and Education in the mayor's office, the core of the mayor's campaign had been to promote children's services. She described the mayor's philosophy as: "How well a community treats its children says a lot about the health of the community." The major element of this initiative was the creation of a Youth Bill of Rights, in which YIF was slightly involved in Phase II.

Establishment of the Youth Board in Phase I

According to its mission statement, the YIFE board's goals and priorities in Phase I were "to support, fund, and train youth to lead service projects that will: create positive permanent change, provide an example of service for other youth, and unleash the power, creativity, and passion of young people."

During both phases of the YIF initiative, the Portland youth board engaged two coordinators who worked together to lead the group, one adult and one young adult coordinator. The adult coordinator worked for Multnomah County Commission on Children, Families and Community (CCFC) and had many years of experience working with youth. The youth co-coordinator role was designed to encourage authentic youth leadership. In Phase I, the youth co-coordinator was a first-year student at Portland State University. As a high school student, the co-coordinator had served as a youth representative on the PPS school board. In Phase I, the

board collaborated with PPS, Portland State University, CCFC, the Portland Schools Foundation, KBOO Radio, and the City of Portland.

The youth board struggled to recruit a group of youth who were representative of the community. At the beginning of Phase I, the board was all female and primarily white, and board members reported being acutely aware that youth members were not representative of the community in terms of race and gender. In an interview in their first year, however, board members reported that they came from different schools and neighborhoods within the Portland area and had different socioeconomic backgrounds, indicating diversity in these important areas.

Following the YIF model, in Phase I the Portland youth board engaged in a community-mapping activity that included a survey of area youth. Community-mapping served the dual purpose of finding out who the "power players" in the community were and finding out what issues concerned the community's youth. The board administered a survey to youth throughout the county, primarily within PPS but also throughout the neighborhoods. More than 700 youth responded to the survey, answering questions about their views on issues in Portland and their lives in general. The board used this survey in Phase I to focus its efforts on issues that were important to Portland's youth. The survey informed their other activities, including the RFP they wrote to generate grant applications for mini-grant awards.

With this information in hand, the central focus of Phase I was awarding mini-grants to youth organizations in Portland, based on the RFP. Using their stated selection criteria, they then decided which applicants would receive grants. In the end, the board awarded 10 grants of up to $1,500 each.[1] According to the co-coordinators, although the area has a history of youth-led civic action, other youth-led initiatives in Portland and Multnomah County have not had access to the same level of resources that the YIFE board had. The adult coordinator said that having this capital gave the board members a unique confidence in the potential impact and efficacy of their work.

> *It's definitely unique among various other youth leadership groups in its vision and in its funding. Something that we hear so often from youth boards and youth members who are engaged in activism, "We could create all sorts of change if we had some capital." Money talks, and they have the funding to back it up.*

In addition, the coordinator noted that the mini-grant RFP allowed youth to see a product of their efforts, which helped keep them motivated and involved:

> *The biggest piece was having a tangible product. For a long time, we were discussing and planning, creating committees and bylaws. The RFP helped people to see or feel what they were doing. Seeing the fruits of their labor helped engage the youth.*

[1] A grant recipient, a newspaper known as *Et Cetera*, wrote in their first edition that ten grants of up to $1,500 were made: http://www.ourcommission.org/pdf/yabpdfs/20056/final_version_web.pdf .

Phase II YIFE Goals

At the end of Phase I, the Portland youth board decided it would focus on youth in education and on supporting youth voice through media. When the board decided to make education an integral part of their goals in Phase II, they renamed themselves Youth Innovation For Education, or YIFE. As board members described partway through Phase II:

> *One thing that sticks out in our vision statement is to see an increase in youth engagement. [To] use multiple action pathways like youth governance, media. If you take off the word "youth," it is the way anyone can be involved in their community.*

However, the YIFE board struggled to identify a set of goals for Phase II that were appropriate for their community, given the other youth engagement efforts underway in Portland. As described in its original impact plan, YIFE wanted to have "advocates" within each Portland high school to spur youth to become engaged in their communities. However, according to the coordinators, the small — and, in the board's view, manageable — project of placing "advocates for service-learning" in area schools to build support and knowledge of service-learning among teachers and students did not meet national sponsors' expectations for broad change. The coordinators described this struggle and the effect it had on the board's goals:

> *[Our proposal was] that in every high school, or two high schools, [there would be a] group of students that are ambassadors for service-learning. [They would be] helping teachers and students start service-learning in their school. This would expand the network of who knows about service-learning. It was manageable and we could do it. The young people were excited. When we submitted that as part of the impact plan, they [reviewers] said that it was too boutique-y and too small. They wanted to see bigger and better. The expectations were higher than we could have ever reached. When we pushed back for more attainable goals, it was seen as not meaningful enough.*

In the end, YIFE chose to focus their Phase II efforts on increasing youth voice and on educational opportunities for young people in the Portland area through the following campaigns:

- **Service-learning.** In this campaign, youth proposed to develop (1) a white paper for PPS that would build the case for an expanded service-learning curriculum and (2) a proposal for service-learning coursework.

- **Youth radio.** The YIFE board proposed to create monthly radio broadcasts to air on the KBOO community radio station's Underground Youth Collective.

- **Youth television.** The YIFE members proposed to create a 30-minute youth news program and to air these news segments on the PPS district channel.

- **Youth newsletters.** Through this campaign, YIFE planned to disseminate youth-produced newsletters to each PPS middle and high school.

YIFE Activities in Phase II

YIFE experienced considerable turnover among youth between Phase I and Phase II of the initiative, leading to challenges in maintaining continuity in the board's identity. The delay in starting Phase II (due to disagreement on goals and subsequent delay in funding) dampened youth enthusiasm to the point that the board lost most of its members. According to one of the coordinators, "It was almost a completely different group of people from one phase to the next." Consequently, much of Phase II was spent bringing youth up to speed on the goals of YIFE, mostly through in-house training sessions, especially on how to use media:

> *[We train so often] because of turnover, and because it can be hard to keep young people engaged. You can do a training, or they might not fully understand it. [You need to] bring people back around and to improve their skills.*

> *That is all we have been doing is training! It hasn't gone as in-depth as we would have liked. Either we are getting new young people in that we are trying to train about the organization, or new equipment, or new media. We are always playing catch-up. We have done trainings in the community. We did an extra training on how to conduct good interviews on the radio.*

YIFE also experienced changes in its consortium of partner organizations in Phase II. Most notably, in Phase II, PPS and Portland State University did not re-commit to participation as consortium partners. The Portland Schools Foundation also dropped its partnership early in Phase II. KBOO remained a consortium partner and was a resource for youth activities throughout the initiative. The reasons for losing the support of consortium partners resided mainly in the board's shifting goals. The coordinators reported on the changes in consortium partners:

> *The City of Portland and Multnomah County were engaged with youth in government. [They] weren't part of the impact plan. The county and the Commission on Children and Families were committed to youth voice, youth media. KBOO has been a strong partner. But the partners haven't worked together well this year, because partners were brought on for specific reasons.*

Advocacy for service-learning. In the first year of Phase II, YIFE prepared a white paper on service-learning and presented it to PPS. Most youth members were actively involved in writing this white paper, which laid out the possibilities for service-learning in PPS. One member described the writing process:

> *We had a meeting three weeks ago. We brainstormed and broke out and researched, and drafted sections. We decided what sections we needed and assigned the sections and then wrote them.*

Youth explained that introducing service-learning in schools would help foster youth community engagement, one of the YIFE's central goals. When asked how they might be able to get youth more involved in their communities, young people responded:

> *More board members! More people in the schools that are part of YIFE. We have to spread it more. A service-learning course would spread it more. In a broader aspect, we need to get kids interested. Get schools to put it out there that kids should help their community. The community would be in better shape.*

> *We laid out a plan to start it [service-learning] in one high school, and hopefully expand it into more high schools.*

The district did not provide feedback on the white paper, however, and it decided not to implement a service-learning program. According to the coordinators, the Portland community was not ready to accept a service-learning initiative, and the board "struggled to gain traction about service-learning work." The coordinators reported:

> *The work that we were trying to do in service-learning the community wasn't ready for. We knew it was going to be a hard sell. It has made Phase II really difficult and frustrating because we get a lot of pressure to be going farther with service-learning, even though we knew it was going to be difficult. That came true. The district backed out, and wasn't engaged. The superintendent is leaving. On the other hand, youth in government is [about] building community partners [and] innovative partnerships.*

> *[The district was] more about strengthening [itself]. To take on something like service-learning, can be risky, innovative. It costs money, you are taking a risk. To implement that, it takes the right mix of people. The district wasn't willing to take that risk.*

Youth media. In Phase II, YIFE used media to cover youth in government activities across the Portland area. Television and radio became tools to track what was important to youth in Portland and the issues that affected youth. YIFE's media outlets also aimed to get youth involved in the community — and possibly to become interested in YIFE itself.

At the beginning of Phase II, board members created radio shows at KBOO. According to the youth advocate employed at KBOO, the goal for YIFE's work was "to share the voices of youth with the radio audience and empower youth to create their own media for accuracy and true representation." Youth members described their work at KBOO:

> *The last radio piece we did was about the racial makeup of schools, how people see schools. A lot of people think that Jefferson is diverse, but in reality it is not as diverse as people think.*

> *We brainstorm topics. We use massive post–it posters or my notebook. We pick topics. For the race/school topic, we did surveys of kids at the schools. Then we found statistics about the actual racial makeup at the schools.*

Later in Phase II, a former YIFE member who had been trained at KBOO led current YIFE members in producing and airing three radio pieces, including one on the Youth Bill of Rights event sponsored by the city and county. As part of the actions surrounding its initiative on youth in government in Portland, the Multnomah Youth Commission held a forum on ratifying the Youth Bill of Rights in spring 2006, followed by a series of activities on institutionalizing youth voice in the city. While YIFE was not involved in creating the Youth Bill of Rights or planning the events, youth members participated as leaders as well as members of discussion groups.

The first event in spring of 2006 was, according to the coordinators, a catalyst for the board in that it helped them start their youth media work. It gave them a substantial event to cover that was well aligned with the board's goals of youth involvement. YIFE also used the Youth Bill of Rights event as part of an application process for future board members whose focus would be on producing media. These applicants interviewed youth at the event using tape recorders and video equipment. Later in Phase II, YIFE members continued to cover Youth Bill of Rights events. In particular, when the county board voted on May 22, 2007, to adopt the youth bill that had been ratified the previous spring, YIFE members covered the event. A former YIFE member also spoke at the event about the importance of the bill.

Effects on Young People and Their Community

Effects on Youth

Increased leadership skills. YIFE members reported learning many types of leadership skills, including how to speak in front of adults and how to bring a project to completion. During the Youth Bill of Rights event, youth participated in breakout sessions to discuss the proposed bill. Based on observation of these sessions, it was clear that YIFE board members were skilled in these types of discussions and that they understood core principles of youth participation and youth rights. They emerged as leaders within the breakout sessions. YIFE members described their leadership roles and the skills they learned through their participation on the board:

> *I facilitate a lot. At the beginning of this year it was [the coordinators]. I feel great having more of a leadership role than before.*

> *This year more than last year it has been more led by us. [The youth coordinator] communicates where and when we are supposed to meet. But most of what we do, we just do. We are left to our own devices.*

> *We are the ones participating and helping think of what to do. We do brainstorming. What I like doing is thinking of what we should do, and connecting everything in a thought plan. That is what I'm good for…. We each have strengths.*

Participation on the YIFE board also opened up other formal opportunities for youth leadership in the community for several young people. As the young-adult coordinator explained:

I started out as a board member and then a media intern. Now I'm director. [Another person] started out as a board member, and now [she received the] Beagle youth involvement award. She will be hired by the city for the Youth Bill of Rights. [The board] opens up opportunities for young people to think deeper.

The coordinators also described other evidence that YIFE participation helped young people gain confidence in their leadership skills:

Some things we can track. Board members who have been employed and have a skill set and have references, or who have worked on the youth board. There are others that are difficult to track. Like opening young people's eyes, who wanted to make a difference but didn't think that young people could. Them starting clubs on their campus, or getting involved in organizing efforts.… Ultimately as they continue in life, it expands their field of possibilities. They see a notice, or a job opportunity to get engaged and might not have thought it was for them – now it is a possibility for them.

Effects on the Community

During the YIF initiative, Portland significantly increased its focus on youth voice and youth engagement in the community through its Youth Bill of Rights initiative. However, the contributions of the YIFE board to these changes were mainly indirect.

In Phase II, YIFE had limited success in engaging the community in its efforts to increase youth voice in the media. Because the Phase II goals for the board were initially uncertain, the board was not able to communicate its purpose to the community. While the mainstream media covered Portland's youth in government and youth engagement activities extensively, YIFE was not directly involved in these efforts in Phase II. The board did engage the community through its KBOO radio shows but was unable to gain traction through this communications route. According to the coordinators:

I don't feel like we have [successfully reached out to the community and explained the board's successes]. We've done some — there has been media outreach on KBOO, and talking about what YIFE does. And producing the story, airing the story that they've created. We've done that as our media piece. There hasn't been success in the service-learning piece that we could report. The only successes are media.

The KBOO adult partner added:

I think the kids enjoyed themselves, but I don't think they felt like they had an impact through media. [It] seemed like [producing radio shows] was always a last minute thing that they had to do, as opposed to a creative way to express themselves or share their work.

YIFE's efforts to create change in the community or in the school system were also stifled by the difficulties it faced in generating support in PPS for service-learning. According to the coordinators:

> *So much of our energy was put into working to get our consortium on the same page and getting PPS on their map with service-learning, that we weren't ready to get the community's [attention]. We needed PPS before we could go to the community. That prevented us from getting the media coverage that we could have had.*

Sustainability

At the end of Phase II, the likely future for YIFE was that it would be absorbed by the Multnomah County Youth Commission and would become the Commission's media arm. The youth coordinator reported that this role for YIFE is "probably the best option. I'm not sure about other options that have come up. I don't know if all of the current youth would be involved." YIFE members had a role in making this option feasible. As the adult coordinator, who also works with the Youth Commission, reported:

> *The YIFE members came and presented to our executive committee [of the Youth Commission.] Then YIFE members represented to the full commission. They were there for debate and discussion of how [YIFE] will be involved.*

Lessons Learned

The struggles of the YIFE board in determining its identity within a context of active youth voice in the community provide a cautionary tale for starting a new youth board in a city with similar existing groups.

Accounting for Existing Community Context

One of the most important lessons to come out of the YIFE board is that any new organization should pay attention to what is already happening on the ground in the community, and their goals should acknowledge that reality. The board's work needs to reflect, represent, and build on the needs and interests of the community in which it is working:

> *Identify issues that have traction. Sometimes it is important to look at the full scope of what needs to be done, and start where you feel like you can actually have success, and build on that success to [begin] on the issues that might be harder. For us, youth in government and service-learning are both really important.… But being realistic, how can we have success, [and] get name recognition? How can we have success for the young people involved?*

A primary challenge for YIFE in Phase II was determining suitable goals and work for the board. The adult co-coordinator explained that consensus-building in Portland is very important. All of the "power players" must be on board with an idea in order for it to take hold, and that was not the case with service-learning:

> *Culturally in Portland, it is difficult for organizations, not just YIFE but any organization, to lead or create a movement without there being community-wide acceptance and willingness. Portland is a collaborative town. If other partners that have key influence, like the district and the Portland Schools Foundation and Youth Commission, all those organizations aren't really brought on if there is a collective community assumption that we are not ready.*

He continued:

> *One thing that Kellogg and [our national sponsor] wanted was for us to be the one and only youth service-learning [advocate] in the community and for us to be irreplaceable. What it comes down to now, in trying to do that, and feeling pressure and resistance from community organizations and the community, we missed this great opportunity to bond with other organizations like the City of Portland and the Youth Commission.… There was too much going on in youth and government that people weren't ready for both aspects.*

Achieving Tangible Results

Producing tangible results leads to continued youth involvement. Keeping the work of the board youth-initiated and inspired by youth is an important ingredient for success. Another lesson learned from the YIFE experience concerns the tension between being youth-driven and funder-driven. Portland's experience suggests the importance of youth having the opportunity to decide what topics are most important and to focus their efforts on those issues. In Portland, the Phase II focus on service-learning and youth media did not allow youth to respond to topics and activities as they arose. An adult partner summed up this lesson as it applied to her organization:

> *I think the experience we had with YIFE led me to not be interested in large granted projects. The mission to fit into the funders' goals left out voices of the actual youth we are trying to work with and "serve." I think it's most important to have youth part of the planning part of the project and ask them what they want and help them make it happen. But then, we are a much more grassroots organization than most that are served well by these models.*

As one of the co-coordinators said, in order to be successful, an organization needs "to be really aware and open to meeting the needs of other people.… To search for common ground. Get out of your comfort zone to built partnerships. The strongest part of Phase I [was] having diverse partners at the table."

Setting clear goals and defining milestones on the way to those goals would have helped YIFE adapt its expectations. The coordinator spoke about the importance of setting goals and tracing progress for YIFE and organizations like it:

> *We could have done better. We never clearly broke down what success would look like. If we would have identified clear targets or goals district-wide for service-learning, where would we need to be? It would have been clearer to us that this wasn't the right campaign. There were clear signs that the district wasn't the strongest ally and partner. That is not an indictment of the district. It didn't work out for them. If we had made a plan and said that we are going to have five projects on the ground, it would have been easier for us to realize that we needed to shift tactics or strategies.*

May 2008 update, provided by AED:

8. Youth Innovation Fund — San Francisco, California

Implementation

Community Context

As the metropolitan center of the Bay Area, San Francisco is a dense city of more than 750,000 residents. According to U.S. Census data in 2000, nearly half of the population is identified as white, 31 percent as Asian, 14 percent as Hispanic or Latino, and 8 percent as black. Approximately 15 percent of the population is under the age of 18. As a generally wealthy and educated city, the median household income in San Francisco is over $55,000, and more than one-third of residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.

The youth board recruited youth members primarily from the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), which serves more than 55,000 students across 160 schools. More than half of SFUSD students are Asian (34 percent) or Latino (22 percent). More than a quarter of SFUSD students are English Language Learners (26 percent), and 57 percent qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch.

San Francisco has an extensive network of youth agencies and a long history of civic engagement for youth. Numerous programs and organizations throughout the school district and city provide youth with opportunities for civic engagement. For example, the SFUSD Student Advisory Council (SAC) consists of representatives from each public high school who meet bi-monthly with the Board of Education to discuss student issues. The San Francisco Youth Commission includes youth representatives from across the city and advises the city's Board of Supervisors and mayor on youth-related issues. In addition, various non-profit agencies, including the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) and Infusion One, both consortium partners for the creation of the youth board in San Francisco, provide ongoing opportunities and training for youth leadership in the city. YLI also operates grant programs that fund youth-led projects.

San Francisco's socioeconomic diversity and tradition of civic activism provided a strong foundation for implementing the Youth Innovation Fund, San Francisco (YIF-SF). However, many of the existing youth programs shared similar missions and features, making it difficult for a new program like YIF-SF to attract participants and provide a unique service. Some YIF-SF staff members initially felt confused about the identity of YIF-SF and wondered about the program's potential impact. According to one consortium partner:

> *I'm curious about the community perception of YIF-SF. On one hand, it's such a blessing that we have such a rich community in terms of youth engagement and civic participation, but at the same time I think it's made it hard to set YIF-SF apart.*

Another adult partner added:

My frank belief is it's hard to get more cutting edge around youth civic engagement than the Bay Area. So I'm not sure that the presence of YIF and its resources is going to dramatically change anything.

Establishment of the Youth Board in Phase I

YIF-SF was launched in 2003 under the leadership of the YLI and two consortium partners, the San Francisco Youth Commission and Infusion One. The founding coordinator, with experience working with the YLI and a background in youth philanthropy, and other adult partners built on expertise in civic engagement and access to community resources to recruit youth members through community and school networks. As a result, some of the 17 young people involved in YIF-SF during its first year were also involved with the San Francisco Youth Commission or Infusion One boards.

Establishing board structures. The YLI used its youth development expertise to craft an infrastructure for the new youth board that enabled the young people to share responsibilities and organize activities collaboratively. At the beginning of the year, the board discussed the roles and objectives of its four subcommittees: evaluation, communications, public affairs, and grants. Youth members were then assigned to one subcommittee. According to the site coordinator, the process was "crucial because they really took ownership of their role on the board." Youth members felt that "if I don't do my part, the other subcommittees can't do their part." Youth members rotated among four different roles in each meeting: the "Tator-Tot" created the agenda and facilitated discussions; the "Watchdog" managed the time; the "Spunk Punk" led the ice-breaker activities; the "Shout-outster" made reminder phone calls to YIF-SF members before the meetings. The organization of the subcommittees and their responsibilities promoted teamwork and camaraderie. The coordinator explained:

It's been cool to see their growth and progression and the relationships that they've built with each other and the relationships that they've built with staff here. Just their work ethic is phenomenal.

YIF-SF also began to establish structures for effective networking with partner organizations in Phase I to gain a foothold in community institutions. In addition to providing youth networks for recruiting, organizations like the San Francisco Youth Commission informed YIF-SF members about the city government structure. According to the coordinator, the consortium's resources "help open up doors for us, help recruit young people to be on the board for us, and help educate their stakeholders and folks in their networks about what we're trying to do." In the second year, SAC leaders took on leadership of YIF-SF, with the San Francisco Youth Commission continuing to work with YIF-SF through this transition.

Action research. As part of the community-mapping focus in the YIF initiative, YIF-SF collected data through both student surveys and focus groups. YIF-SF administered 200 surveys asking students to identify and prioritize school-related issues of concern. The surveys also gauged opinions about opportunities for student involvement in decision-making and planning at their schools. Information collected from surveys helped YIF-SF develop themes and questions

for focus groups. Youth members conducted 12 citywide focus groups involving more than 300 students across six public high schools, four middle schools, and one communication organization. The focus groups provided in-depth opportunities for the youth board to learn about student concerns and needs.

The focus groups and open forums that YIF-SF youth members conducted in Phase I to research student issues also provided an opportunity to compare schools. As a result, youth members began to notice the disparities in school quality in the city. Whereas some schools such as Lowell offered leadership programs, others like Mission High School lacked basic college-prep courses. One youth member commented about her experiences with YIF-SF:

> *I really learned a lot from going to our workshops and talking to all of these different kids and seeing what their experiences are. There's no uniform thing that's going on, and I wonder why there [are] so many inequities.*

The coordinator described similar realizations among youth members who participated in the YIF Phase I cross-site trainings. These training sessions deepened their understanding of YIF as a national initiative that mobilized youth to serve their communities, and helped youth learn about issues facing youth in other cities. The coordinator described the cross-site training sessions:

> *For students who got to travel and meet other youth, they are part of a bigger picture in improving their community and schools. [It's] eye-opening to meet people with other ideas than their own. They were surprised to see that we all care about the same thing.*

The collection of student data through surveys and focus groups allowed YIF-SF to identify core concerns of San Francisco youth in a systematic way. Results revealed three areas of highest concern to young people: barriers to teacher effectiveness (e.g., low expectations and poor teacher quality), lack of policy impact of student governments (e.g., limited representation and communication with administrators), and problems with the physical and emotional climate of schools (e.g., poor facilities and student racism).

Grantmaking. The YIF-SF grants subcommittee designed an RFP with the goal of helping youth-led groups develop projects to address important issues in their schools. The board reviewed written proposals and identified concerns and questions for follow-up conversations with applicants. Following a presentation by applicants, the board offered specific recommendations and made final grant decisions, awarding grants to projects that included a student-led newsletter, a peer-mentoring club, and workshops connecting teachers with students.

The process of designing the RFP and awarding grants provided a vehicle for students to voice their ideas for school change. The use of focus groups and rallies were effective in encouraging student-led groups to seek funds for projects that involved more than traditional services such as community volunteering.

We're not just asking kids to come up with service projects. We're asking them to get in the face of their principals. Because this stuff is pretty serious, and there's a lot to it, we've put in a great deal of structure.

Phase II YIF-SF Goals

The knowledge and skills gained from the foundational stages of the initiative, particularly the insight into student concerns, informed YIF-SF's long-term impact plan for Phase II. Through their action research work, YIF-SF concluded that, while San Francisco offered excellent models for youth engagement, little collaboration existed among youth groups that shared overlapping goals. The action research also made it clear that an important missing element in the city was a strong youth coalition focusing on school quality and change. As a result, YIF-SF designed the following goals with a focus on building a strong youth coalition focusing on school change:

- **Engage young people** in influencing policies and decisions about public schools
- **Strengthen existing vehicles and build new vehicles** for young people's engagement and voice
- **Encourage the school district and related public systems to become more responsive and accountable** to young people and provide sufficient resources to support youth voice

YIF-SF Activities in Phase II

As noted, YIF-SF membership changed substantially during the second phase of the YIF initiative, with new community partners and turnover among both staff and youth members. The board also struggled to actively engage youth members in Phase II. Four young people were actively engaged in the final year of the initiative. The new coordinator said:

In the first three or four months, I was bummed out that we didn't have more young people. But now that I think about it, I'd much rather work with a small group who were invested in the program than bring people in piecemeal.

Maintaining a coalition. Reflecting its increased emphasis on creating a diverse coalition of youth-serving organizations throughout San Francisco, in Phase II of the YIF initiative YIF-SF expanded its partnerships with local agencies to include the San Francisco Peer Resources, Pacific News Service, Mission Dignity, the Indochinese Housing Development Corporation, and the Youth Credit Union Program.

It made sense to partner with community groups at a broader level who had interests in serving students, so that, when any group tried to accomplish something, there would be a broader base of support if something [political pressure] came down.

Because coalition members provided a wide range of perspectives and resources, maintaining the coalition required constant effort. In an effort to engage all members of the coalition, different organizations hosted YIF-SF meetings, allowing students to better understand coalition partners and the communities they served. This process of rotating hosts for meetings supported networking among partners and reinforced shared goals. These meetings also allowed partners to distribute research and access information on their goals. One partner explained:

> *We found that initially one of the draws was that…each organization hosted meetings so that they could get to know each other. [The] positive side was that people were making connections and saw commonality of overall goals.*

YIF-SF continued to work closely with the SAC, building on that group's inside access to the school system and schools. According to the lead YIF-SF consortium partner, "We had a successful two years working closely with the district and with the administration and young people. They had done lots of research to develop the impact plan and grantmaking and had other successes in building their capacity for being advocates for student participation at the district and school level." At the same time, however, local politics especially between the superintendent's office and the SAC (including "adultism" issues) led to challenges and changes, including a breakdown in the relationship between the superintendent and the SAC. Because of these pressures, the SAC's role shifted within YIF-SF to that of a member of the coalition, rather than the lead organization.

Over time, the coordinator and other partners agreed that maintaining the coalition was the greatest challenge. Although organizations hosted meetings to connect with each other, the coordinator noted that "people are already committed to their organizations; they have limited time." Organizations showed interest but needed to be engaged regularly. The process involved relationship building and repairing. The coordinator described the situation:

> *[We] had a hard time getting a consistent group of people present…not always the same group. [The] problem was building a coalition and doing coalition work at the same time.*

The coordinator from the end of Phase II expressed a similar sentiment:

> *…A big part of my work is rebuilding relationships with the community consortium… because the coalition was ebb and flow and difficult to sustain. That was a major goal…and to let them know we're still here and advocate youth change.*

Website development. Phase II focused mainly on launching and updating a YIF-SF website. Despite an extensive network of youth-related research in San Francisco and organizations doing similar work, the public and youth had little access to such information. As the new coordinator observed:

One of the big questions was how do we get all of that knowledge collected so that it's not like reinventing the wheel. New students should come in…and have a body of work to stand on.

YIF-SF decided that a website would preserve the existing knowledge about youth involvement in San Francisco and become a growing body of work about resources for youth involvement in San Francisco. In addition, the website would allow coalition members to post information or survey results and organize events.

It's also a place where things can be visible so that, even if people turn over, there's a history there. Part of the goal is to create a combination of archive and a current community to get youth perspectives and publish on a regular basis. And it's a place to point policy-makers and decision-makers.

A professional web designer assisted in creating the website, and youth members uploaded blogs and youth-related information. One youth member described her role as "a little bit of everything…writing, editing, brainstorming, and analyzing." Members also reported on conditions and issues at their schools and wrote opinion pieces on the website.

Despite some delays and other technical difficulties, the YIF-SF board launched the youth website in 2007. Because the board expected the website to serve as a tool for addressing key issues like coalition-building, outreach and advocacy, research dissemination, and student voice, the launching of the website was a significant accomplishment for the organization. In addition to helping youth report on school issues, the website made available the research and resources that YIF-SF had collected since Phase I. One youth member described the project:

Our goal is to give them [youth] a chance to speak up by using our website's blogs and school watches. Also, the website has the latest youth-related events, so we often update the website. It also provides information and resources for the youths to use, such as the latest local community and school events, as well as bus routes for teens.

Youth members also made efforts to inform their audience of the website and promote its purpose and functions. Because many of YIF-SF's goals depended on using the website, the delays in launching it affected the pace and effectiveness of other activities such as advocacy and research. The success of the website depended on the public's awareness of its existence and function. According to one youth member, "Not that many youth know about this. [We] must have more launch events to spread the word out." To accomplish this goal, youth members also invited organizations and youth to information sessions that outlined the goals of the website and the long-term vision of YIF-SF. As one youth member explained, "We actually go to different communities to hear about their sayings and take notes. It's better to work with people personally than any other way." As part of an outreach strategy, the Youth Board attended youth events and disseminated information about the website on note cards.

Effects on Young People and Their Community

Effects on Youth

Awareness of community inequities. The young people involved in YIF-SF came from many socioeconomic backgrounds, schools, and levels of prior experience in youth organizations. These differing experiences helped young people become increasingly aware of inequities in their communities. In particular, the personal experiences of youth members from different SFUSD schools provided insight into the complexity of the San Francisco school system. One young person noted:

> *I'll look at some of the other youth I'm on the board with and some of them go to Treasure Island [continuation school]. Others go to a typical high school like Burton or Washington. They have a good mix of experiences, a good idea of what it's like to be in the school system.*

Increased civic responsibility. Youth board members in San Francisco developed an increased understanding of the active role young people could take in addressing issues in their schools and communities. For most youth members, serving on YIF-SF provided a new understanding of their communities and how they can implement change. One youth member explained:

> *Before to me, everything was fine…but then when you actually get into it [the detail], there are many problems you need to solve. My school was fine but others….*

Another youth member felt convinced of the possibility of student voice in his community:

> *Being in the YIF board made me change my point of view regarding the community. I always thought it was impossible to have a voice in the community and make changes to it. After I'm involved with the project, my voice was publicly heard.*

Another young person commented:

> *Before I was involved with this board, I felt like youth weren't able to solve problems because adults solved most of those issues in communities. After being a member, I realized that youth are extremely important to the community because we are the ones who give information to the adults…. It's kind of like the youths are the start and adults come in the middle, [and] we all bond together at the end to finish.*

The experiences of YIF-SF also taught young people that, before youth can become agents of change, they first need help in understanding how to challenge the status quo, identify problems and create solutions, and mobilize student voice. One youth member explained the challenge:

It's hard to teach someone about all these inefficiencies in their schools. They don't get it or wonder why is that such a big deal. They just see it as the way it is. It's hard to teach them that you can change the way it is and have an opinion.

Increased confidence and communication skills. Young people reported improving their public-speaking and communication skills as a result of participation in YIF-SF. Not surprisingly, many felt more confident and experienced a higher level of self-esteem. Young people commented:

As time passed, I became more open-minded. I can express myself in any way because I wasn't that shy girl anymore. I started to study and work harder, which changed me completely as a person.

I've called schools, supervisors for all districts. They ask us questions, and I get nervous, but it helped me develop a lot of public-speaking skills.

An adult partner also commented on the transformation:

[YIF-SF] helped them build confidence…something they weren't sure they were able to do. Now, I feel like they've built a level of maturity…when they are with YIF, they are serious.

Youth also gained interviewing and resume writing skills as a result of their interactions with consortium organizations and adult partners. For example, staff members used the YLI curriculum on civic engagement to teach students about outreach and management strategies, presentation skills, and event planning. Youth members in Phase II also gained technical skills related to the website and training in writing and editing.

Effects on the Community

Working within a context of existing youth engagement and civic action, the YIF-SF board was challenged to make a noticeable impact on the community during the four years of the YIF initiative. Many members of YIF-SF agreed that discerning the long-term impact of YIF on the San Francisco community will require time and patience. A relatively new organization like YIF-SF must carve out its own niche in the city. In addition, the board decided early on to focus on school change and issues relating to students, rather than the overall community.

The work of YIF-SF alerted some adults in the schools and neighborhoods about the group's efforts to increase youth voice and expanded some intergenerational partnerships. Despite the slow pace of change in the community, one YIF-SF member noted, "There are people who know who we are and know what we do. The youth enjoy making changes in their community, and they see the progress being made." The perception of youth, especially board members, has changed as well. According to one adult partner, the youth board is "perceived as leaders [who] want to make a difference in schools…. My coworkers were impressed with their level of work."

Sustainability

At the end of Phase II of the YIF initiative, uncertainty surrounded the structure and future of the YIF-SF board. According to the coordinator, "[We] might change the board's structure but…in order for us to launch additional parts of YIF and new initiatives, we have to come full circle and close out so that it's not just limping along." In addition, the website project and coalition building continued to divert attention and resources from planning for the future. In some ways, the leadership viewed the conclusion of Phase II as a necessary ending that creates an opportunity to experiment with new ideas and to expand. The coordinator explained, "[We] want to finish strong and begin a new era [and] look at expanding and going outside of schools."

Lessons Learned

The experiences and lessons learned during the four-year YIF initiative in San Francisco provide a useful guide for communities seeking to add structures for youth civic engagement in a context with strong existing support and opportunities for youth engagement.

Establishing and Maintaining Institutional Support

The YIF-SF board added new consortium partners in Phase II but struggled to maintain regular contact and provide updates on the status of projects. The coordinator noted that the level of support from coalition partners tends to ebb and flow such that two or three key lead agencies should guide the organization. However, for a true coalition to be successfully built, partner organizations need clear and defined roles. Aside from providing access to networks and community resources, the San Francisco Youth Commission and Infusion One played a limited role in YIF-SF in Phase I. One partner commented, "We need to figure out what those relationships [with YIF-SF] look like and how our organization participates aside from having some commissioners sit on the board."

Establishing a Concrete Identity

Many adult partners recommended planning a big vision but starting small with concrete and tangible tasks for youth to engage in. One community partner said, "I'd tell folks [to] think big, but break it down into feasible, manageable campaigns and movements where youth rally around and build." The Phase II goal of YIF-SF to establish a coalition around youth engagement was important but perhaps difficult to truly galvanize young people around, leading to limited participation in YIF-SF activities.

In addition, well-defined goals can help an organization find its identity among other groups that are also seeking to increase youth civic engagement. YIF-SF struggled to distinguish

itself from other youth groups. The challenge is to provide a unique and useful service that adds to the overall youth movement in the community. One consortium partner explained:

> *How do we define the role of all of our organizations? How do we make sure that we're all at the table together? How do we determine each group's role in order to further the youth agenda? How does YIF-SF differ from the role of the SAC, of the San Francisco Youth Commission, or Y-MAC [Youth Making a Change]?*

The goals of the youth board also need to be aligned to achieve the biggest possible impact given the context in which the board operates. For example, the mini-grants awarded by YIF-SF had less appeal than in a community that did not have a pre-existing basis of youth philanthropy. YIF-SF competed with other organizations that distribute larger grants for student-led projects. An adult partner explained:

> *We are only giving out $10,000. In San Francisco, young people have access to about a quarter million dollars for youth-led projects, maybe even $500,000. A $2,000 grant is not going to make a difference or change anything.*

May 2008 update, provided by AED:

9. Ypsilanti Youth Empowered to Act — Ypsilanti, Michigan

Implementation

Community Context

The Ypsilanti Youth Empowered to Act (YYEA) board came together in a community with few opportunities for youth civic engagement or input prior to the Youth Innovation Fund initiative. The YYEA reached out to the young people in Ypsilanti City schools and in three neighboring school districts (Lincoln, Van Buren, and Willow Run), each of which has a single high school.

According to the 2000 Census, Ypsilanti City has 22,362 residents and Ypsilanti Township has 49,182 residents. Ypsilanti City is much poorer than the surrounding jurisdictions and the county as a whole. In 1999 dollars, Ypsilanti City had a median income of $28,610, whereas the countywide median was $51,990. Ypsilanti City is 61 percent white, 31 percent African-American, and 8 percent other race/ethnicity, while more rural neighboring areas in Washtenaw County have a greater proportion of white residents and a smaller proportion of African-American residents. According to YYEA records, 19 percent of Ypsilanti City residents are aged 10-19, and 12 percent of Ypsilanti Township residents are that age.

Ypsilanti did not have a history of supporting youth civic engagement, and there were few opportunities for youth input, creating a challenging context in which to launch a youth board with ambitious goals for community change. The city did not have other youth boards or councils. At the start of the YIF initiative, community decisions about youth were regularly made without youth input. In general, youth were not expected to participate in civic decisions, and several respondents said that much of the community had a negative view of youth. The YYEA coordinator explained, "It's not that the adults don't care or that they wouldn't listen. [Youth engagement] is just an afterthought. The whole concept is totally alien to them."

Establishment of the Youth Board in Phase I

The original YIF grant proposal was submitted by four consortium partners, the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, Neutral Zone, Ypsilanti Public Schools, and Eastern Michigan University, with a shared goal to promote youth civic engagement and empowerment in Ypsilanti.

In Phase I, the Ypsilanti youth board struggled with turnover among both youth and adults. All but one of the initial cohort of youth members left the board before Phase II began. Additionally, the original YYEA coordinator was asked to resign at the close of Phase I. Despite this turnover, YYEA successfully implemented the community-mapping, power analysis, and youth philanthropy activities of the YIF's Phase I model. The young people of YYEA surveyed Ypsilanti youth, local businesses, and government officials and used the results of this community-mapping project to inform the themes highlighted in their mini-grant RFP and

eventually the Phase II impact plan. Over two years in Phase I, YYEA awarded eight mini-grants for a total award amount of $11,400 to Ypsilanti area students for implementing projects that highlighted the role of youth leadership in addressing community issues, including student health issues and the need to increase youth leadership opportunities in schools. YYEA also worked to create a video to document youth activism and youth programming during Phase I. This project used youth media to create civic engagement opportunities for youth. As part of the project, the adult cinematographer created internship positions and workshops for youth board members to learn filmmaking skills.

In its second year, YYEA emphasized the creation of a sustainable presence in the community by establishing the Community Voices Board (CVB), made up of influential community, business, government and service organization leaders. The CVB was asked to enter into youth-adult partnerships to mentor young people in community organizing. The CVB met with YYEA on several occasions, engaging in youth-led conversations about supporting YYEA. This was an empowering experience for many young people as they learned how to gain access to resources in the community and began to establish structures for ongoing youth engagement in Ypsilanti.

Phase II YYEA Goals

As expressed formally in the impact plan, YYEA goals are based on a shared vision of developing an infrastructure to ensure long-term youth engagement in Ypsilanti. The goals sought to sustain relationships with YYEA consortium partners and to develop opportunities for YYEA youth to collaborate with other youth and adults on issues that they identified as important in Phase I.

The Phase II impact plan described four YYEA campaign strategies. These strategies were used to organize the youth board's activities and prepare for its long-term sustainability:

- **Uniting youth across the three school districts** and creating an Ypsilanti Youth Coalition with common strategies for youth civic engagement
- **Securing youth membership and voice** on targeted decision-making boards, committees, and governing bodies within the Ypsilanti community
- **Creating an Ypsilanti Community Coalition** with the goal of connecting youth-focused constituencies within the community
- **Establishing a Ypsilanti Youth Fund Endowment**

Although not identified as formal goals, three other priorities emerged as driving factors for YYEA activities:

- Creating more spaces and opportunities for safe, enriching activities for Ypsilanti youth

- Providing additional opportunities for students from the area high schools to interact

- Increasing opportunities for youth to participate in and contribute to decisions affecting their lives

YYEA Activities in Phase II

YYEA changed little in terms of structure in Phase II. For the most part, YYEA did not change the organization of the youth board, although it did make a concerted effort to shore up its youth membership. In the second year of Phase II, YYEA increased its active membership to 22 and regularly had 14 to16 board members present and active at meetings. The coordinators observed that establishing a stronger base of board members allowed the board to develop its structure more fully and gave it a greater opportunity to focus on development and programming.

The composition of the consortium changed slightly, reflecting YYEA's objective of moving toward developing school-based groups. According to the impact plan, the YYEA consortium changed in order to "meet the needs of creating sustainable youth voice in the Ypsilanti community." Most notably, the Neutral Zone, which served early on as a role model for YYEA, left the partnership. Eastern Michigan University became YYEA's fiduciary agent and provided its physical location. YYEA intended to develop YYEA chapters in each of the three local school districts, thereby recruiting new youth and gathering them around a common youth-focused agenda. However, these plans did not materialize as intended, and YYEA was unable to establish active YYEA chapters in the local schools. Although YYEA made contact with representatives at several area high schools, they gained limited traction. Turnover of key contacts, including high school principals, made it especially difficult to get the effort off the ground. Instead, in Phase II of the YIF initiative, YYEA engaged in a series of activities designed to increase opportunities for youth in the community and to create a stronger foundation for sustained youth engagement.

Community youth mapping project. Although YYEA conducted some community-mapping in Phase I, in Phase II it received a substantial $1 million grant from Washtenaw County to lead a more rigorous mapping exercise in collaboration with other organizations over a two-year period. The goal of the project was to bring youth and adults together to map out all the available safe places, opportunities, and resources for youth. The YYEA youth mappers worked two paid days a week, one day collecting data and one day attending youth-development workshops. Approximately 35 to 40 youth participated each summer during Phase II. The main outcome of the community-mapping partnership will be an internet database for youth, describing recreational and other resources in Washtenaw County.

The community-mapping project was considered an ongoing success and provided an opportunity for YYEA to partner in substantive ways with other organizations in Washtenaw County. The project also contributed to the establishment of YYEA as a trusted and valuable asset to the community. The coordinator said that working with the county was very helpful:

Our partnership with the county was great.… This activity is on the county level and has received county-wide recognition.… The networking has been great. We got the largest grant, even though it is usually the bigger non-profits that get that kind of funding.

The project is adding to the awareness of our program. It brings awareness for the people who didn't know about us or about youth. The county [government] is a big power player. They see that we did well with this, and then we can leverage [this] for future monies.

The coordinator also noted that youth who participated in the community-mapping exercise were enthusiastic and that their participation in the mapping contributed to their overall connection to and interest in YYEA.

Talent show. During Phase II, YYEA's annual talent show emerged as a major focus. The talent show, entitled "That's Wassup," brought together performers and audience members from area schools. Focused on themes of youth civic action, the talent show allowed youth to manage and direct a large-scale event that featured their work and publicized YYEA throughout the community. The idea for the talent show came from youth board members, who then handled key parts of the preparation and production. They solicited for auditions at many schools, developed a selection rubric, hosted the auditions, chose who would perform, planned the event, and led the rehearsals. Youth also were involved in designing the stage and setting up sound and light equipment. Board members worked to avoid the competitive atmosphere that usually exists at an event involving multiple schools. The coordinator said, "This is not the Apollo. It wasn't a competition. Early on, there were some who wanted to have it be competitive, but the board decided in the end that it should not be."

One youth board member described the ways in which the talent show was a youth-driven event:

We found the venue. Then we went to all the schools to open it up to all youth in the area — Huron, Belleville, the three city high schools, two middle schools, and we went to the county schools as well. We planned the flyers and the whole design. We thought of the theme to link all the presentations together.… For the auditions, we developed a rubric with originality, youth voice, civic action, bettering ourselves, and so on. We didn't want poems or performances focused on sex, drugs, or money.

The talent show successfully brought youth together and broadcast the work of YYEA to the larger community, focusing awareness and recognition to YYEA and its agenda of advancing youth voice. It also brought many youth together from different schools that supported the YYEA campaign of uniting youth. The spring 2007 talent show drew more than 300 people, and the site coordinators estimated that 80 percent of them were youth. One youth said, "The talent show was very successful. We had lots of people attend. We got media coverage and were written up in the newspaper."

Outreach to government agencies. Building on Phase I success, YYEA also set out in Phase II to secure youth membership and influence on key governing bodies in the Ypsilanti community. Foremost, they targeted the Ypsilanti City Council, its Parks and Recreation Commission, and the local school board. The impact plan described plans to target specific governing boards, identify youth members to represent YYEA, and make contact with key allies on the boards.

This project evolved into a multi-year strategic effort that provided many opportunities for youth to develop skills and for city leaders to take note of the YYEA agenda. In the second year of Phase II, YYEA representatives described a process to achieve its goal of the city council establishing an Ypsilanti Youth Commission with at least one youth seat. The commission would focus on issues important to youth, such as schools, transportation, and parks and recreation. Over two years, YYEA met with members of city council on five occasions, including a formal presentation that was videotaped and posted on the Internet. They also met with two mayors and continue to meet with the current mayor — on a first-name basis, as a board member pointed out. The current mayor is active in developing a relationship with YYEA board members, having introduced them to a U.S. Senator and invited them to various forums and meetings. As part of this effort to advance youth voice, board members received training in advocacy and public speaking. They also developed relationships with members of the governing bodies through personal and email communication.

YYEA's work with Ypsilanti government leaders provided opportunities for the youth board members to form relationships with the mayor, city council members, and a member of the city Parks and Recreation Commission. The mayor's contact with YYEA resulted in the appointment of a YYEA member to a task force, among other mayoral actions. An email communication to YYEA from the Ypsilanti mayor said:

> *At the YYEA meeting last night I forgot to mention the downtown Ypsi business forum meeting tonight at the EMU College of Business. I hope that YYEA can have some representation at this meeting. I'm really glad the YYEA board took the time to meet Sen. Debbie Stabenow. She was thrilled to meet you. I hope we can continue activities like this in the future.*

YYEA succeeded in encouraging the city council to involve youth to a greater extent than they had previously. In part resulting from several years of YYEA communication with key members of the Ypsilanti Parks and Recreation Commission and presentations to the city council, the Ypsilanti City Council decided to add four new youth seats to the Park and Recreation Commission. Unfortunately, it appears that the Ypsilanti economy and political priorities have made it unlikely that a city-level youth commission will be established in the near future. Nevertheless, the city council has met with YYEA board members and given consideration to a youth commission, which may leave an opening for future policy changes. The coordinator explained:

> *We talked with the council members about research and case studies of youth commissions. And then the board met with the council in April. They wanted more youth to present on the topic, but said they can't fund further research for a youth commission.*

The city is in deep debt. Our board was really bummed out, after all that work they put into it. But it is good that the ordinance passed, and it got attention in the newspaper. The council will increase the Parks and Recreation Commission from seven to 11 seats, with four seats reserved for youth. We spoke with the Recreation Commission back in 2005 about this. We didn't get much credit for it, but the genesis of the idea came from the YYEA board. We have an email from [member] on the commission about it thanking us.

Considering the difficulty of YYEA's ambitious plan of changing Ypsilanti government, this effort can be regarded as a success, in the sense that the city council gave serious consideration to the YYEA agenda of forming a youth commission and YYEA board members developed authentic relationships with influential leaders in the community. YYEA members earned the respect of area business and government leaders, who saw firsthand their work in advocating for youth. The changes in community attitudes are largely the result of personal interactions.

Support for youth leadership. The YYEA board also continued to support the development of additional youth leadership opportunities through youth philanthropy and training opportunities. YYEA continued to award mini-grants to youth-led projects in Phase II, because board members believed that the community found the mini-grants a valuable resource for small yet important projects in the Ypsilanti area. The board members were responsible for developing the call for mini-grant proposals and assisting with applications. They also were involved in reviewing the applications, interviewing potential grantees, and awarding the mini-grants.

In addition, over six weeks in spring 2007, YYEA partnered with Parkridge Community Center to conduct a series of Youth Visioning Workshops that focused on developing leadership skills. Topics included public speaking, diversity, communication, and networking skills. These events were also an opportunity to engage youth in discussion about the future of recreation in the area and how youth can effect change.

Effects on Young People and Their Community

Effects on Youth

Commitment to civic change. Two activities in particular, institutionalizing youth voice and community-mapping, affected how youth regard their own efficacy and community. Several youth spoke of developing ambitious intentions and confidence in their own abilities. As one young person said:

Now I believe it is important to get involved in the community that is your home. You should make a legacy of it. You can get involved in the politics, and even be the mayor if you apply yourself. You can make your community a better place. I think you have to try the best you can now to get ready for later on.

YYEA youth board members reported that changes in their attitudes toward civic action occurred in tandem with their increased understanding of the political process. Perhaps the foremost realization was the necessity to stay committed and disciplined in advancing one's agenda. To the surprise of some community leaders, this is just what the YYEA youth did. As several individuals said:

> *I learned that we first need a clear understanding of what problems we have and what we can do about them. Why do we have the problems? We made a presentation on these with the mayor and city council several times. We had two meetings with the new mayor, and were working with him to start a Youth Commission…We had to go through quite a process. At first, when we gave a presentation they thought we were cute. And they didn't care. Then we kept going back. After the last one, they realized we have been coming for four years. They realized that we are serious and want change.*
>
> *When I first started, I wanted to know about my community. I was new. I wondered why Ypsilanti is like it is. My intentions were to solve problems, but then I realized I wanted to find the root causes and change them.*
>
> *I know that even if I am not always correct, with some help from adults, we youth can contribute. I know that we can have a real effect. We are not just token players. Now we have others asking for our help. I am on the school board. [A peer] is on the mayor's 2020 Vision Board. We are the future of tomorrow. We are going to be the ones running the city…We stay committed. Change is not in a month or even a year. It takes many years. But if you stick with it and invest in it, eventually they will listen and take you seriously. It took us four years to get a meeting, but then we got it.*

As adults involved in the initiative had hoped, the young people of YYEA developed a sense of empowerment and youth voice:

> *They learned they can have adults listen to them. They know how to feel more comfortable having decision-making power. They can be involved in decisions and have become more involved. They know how to communicate.*
>
> *[After several years of YYEA] the board also understood that they are valued members that have a right to present and ask for the city council to do something. They gained a sense of empowerment. Three years ago youth wouldn't even have thought that they could be present at a city council meeting. Now they believe they have the right to make a difference. That sense of empowerment is not even held by adults in this community. So for young folks to feel this way is huge. It was powerful that the mayor was there and looked at them as the representatives of youth in Ypsilanti.*

Increased attachment to the community. YYEA youth board members' commitment to improving their community grew out of their sense of connection to Ypsilanti and having a better understanding of the community. Youth said that learning about their community was an important influence in the development of their desire to contribute to the community.

YYEA changed my view of community in general. My family is from the Caribbean, so people would say, why do you care about this community? But that doesn't matter, I live here and want to give to the community. It represents me, and I represent it. Whatever I can do, I want to do for improving it. I feel more driven now because of the past few years with YYEA. No matter how small a change it might be, I know I can make that change.

Another youth board member said:

Before, I didn't know much about the community. I didn't even know who the mayor was. But I have learned about the government and how it works. YYEA shaped who I became.

Increased skills. Consistent with developing new attitudes and understandings about civic action, YYEA board members also developed skills that would allow them to advance their work in the community. By pressing for the formation of a Youth Commission, young people learned to negotiate the political process of Ypsilanti. One youth said that being committed to the organization was an important learning experience.

Dedication and consistency are key. You also have to be educated on your community. Start by knowing what you want to get out of your efforts. Know who you need to talk with to get your agenda carried out. And be willing to take others' suggestions and work with them. You have to build your coalition and may need to compromise.

An adult partner added:

[To get access to city council] they found the right political levers to pull. They played politics to advance their issue. First, they got the lay of the land and found which council members they needed to lobby. They built a coalition. And they went to the council and got their message out. Now they have opened huge doors. This has never been done by youth around here before. And delayed gratification is tough. These were a bunch of boring meetings, and they stuck with it.

Youth also developed confidence in their presentation and advocacy skills. Once the YYEA youth secured an opportunity to formally present their agenda to city council, they and their adult partners worked on developing their presentation skills. Youth saw their city council presentation as an opportunity that they had worked a long time to achieve, and it was an opportunity for which they wanted to be prepared. In the end, the process leading up to and including the presentation resulted in improved communication skills. One youth said, "I have developed my self-confidence. I am a whole different person. I have a better sense of character and more speaking skills." Others described:

I learned that you can't be shy. If you want to make change, you have to have your voice ready to be heard. I presented to city council and the mayor. At first, I didn't want to be a part of it. But I ended up being the facilitator. The first part of it was that I couldn't be shy. But I also had to make a schedule or agenda about what we were going to talk about and who was going to say it. It was important that we follow a time schedule

exactly. Time is important. So we had to keep the presentation very structured. I even had to cut people off.

I learned a lot about leadership roles. You can have an opinion without being pushy. I learned presentation skills and how to use your posture and voice. I developed public speaking comfort. Now I know who the mayor is and that I am part of the process. You can't just say that you want something. You have to give good reasons why and keep at it. I realize now that you have to talk about this with many people. And you may only have 30 seconds to get your message across. We practiced that. And I learned how to talk with youth and get them involved to make a difference.

Effects on the Community

The efforts of YYEA to bring attention to youth in the Ypsilanti community and create opportunities for youth voice were successful in changing adult perceptions of youth and their role in the community and in creating structures for youth involvement.

Changing adult perceptions of youth. The community-mapping project gave youth hands-on experience in working with adults in the community and in presenting themselves in a positive way to local adults. One adult partner described:

Many of the youth mappers said they would have sat around and done nothing during the summer. Instead, the skills they developed were great. Many of them were foster care kids, yet the skill development was impressive. They walked into establishments and were communicating with owners like they were peers. Usually they are seen as a pest or someone who should leave. Some even got job offers. The community-mapping project was successful at bridging a divide.

Youth also reported that they made strong connections with adults through their experiences with YYEA.

YYEA shaped who I became. Most of the things I do now are related to YYEA, I can connect them to YYEA. For instance, I was asked to serve on the mayor's 2020 Vision task force. I started YYEA at 14, but I am now technically an adult so the mayor asked me to serve.… There were others last year who got jobs that stem from being in this group. People who are affiliated with YYEA get to know more people in the community.

However, although youth had made some key allies through the work of YYEA, adult partners also noted that there were still improvements to be made in the perceptions of youth by the community at large. An adult partner said:

[Community support] is an uphill battle. We have made inroads with key people, but not with the general public. Many still have a negative view of youth. This area is segregated, so class and race get mixed into what people think of youth. We have had some great impact, but it is a long hard road.

Youth as resources in the community. YYEA youth were increasingly recognized in the community as being experts on youth voice who can share their knowledge as consultants. The coordinator explained:

> *We have created a culture where we are experts on youth voice. People ask to have our youth board members give training and advice…Two board members and myself spoke to a government class on civic law day on the concept of youth voice and what we do. We taught all day long. The After-School Collaborative and High Scope asked us to speak on civic engagement at their conference. Then a woman from Flint asked our board to speak with their board. Belleville was the same thing. They called to have us train their board. West Willow wants to start a youth center and wants our board to speak.*

New structures for youth engagement. As described, YYEA stimulated extensive discussion about a possible Ypsilanti Youth Commission. Although that has not yet been formed, youth members were added to the Parks and Recreation Commission. More importantly, local leaders now know the contribution that youth can make within formal and informal bodies. One youth board member said:

> *We are showing to everyone the importance of youth voice and involvement. When I went to get a letter of recommendation, the treasurer on the Ypsilanti Commission told me he had never hear youth talk like us at YYEA. He really showed me respect.*

An adult partner said:

> *YYEA has changed the government's view of youth. YYEA presence and respect are known. If you reference YYEA, they know what is possible of youth. The board should be proud of their work.*

Increased collaboration among youth-serving organizations. Through its outreach efforts, YYEA increased collaboration among youth organizations in Ypsilanti. For example, YYEA partnered with several other organizations to conduct the community-mapping project. It also worked with the Parkridge Community Center as advisors and as partners to deliver a series of youth leadership events. The board brought organizations together by using its mini-grants to fund collaborative projects. YYEA has broken down barriers between the three area high schools by creating collaborative opportunities such as the talent show. The coordinator said:

> *Another success is our collaborative nature. It is unfortunate that other non-profits have to compete. There are limited funds and youth, so it is natural that there be some competition. But we have always been collaborative. We serve the entire city and township and have had some success in bringing together organizations. For example, for the Noise Permit project, we brought together Ozone House and WATT. Both wanted an outdoor event, but our youth board said that they would have to work together to get the mini-grant money. They ended up having a great event.*

An adult partner said:

YYEA was able to get non-profits that serve youth talking and has been rallying the resources for common good of youth. They were not a competitor, so not a threat.

Sustainability

At the end of Phase II of the YIF initiative, the YYEA planned to evolve into two separate youth organizations, one that will maintain the YYEA name and mission and another that will focus on business and job skills. In spring 2007, it became clear that potential funders, as well as many youth and other community members, were interested in youth organizations that would help youth prepare for work and business enterprise. A contributing factor in this interest was the fact that this region of Michigan was entering a deep economic slow-down. Blue-collar employment has long been the bedrock of the local economy, but those job opportunities were shrinking. Thus, many in the community were becoming acutely aware of the need to prepare youth to develop new job skills.

As a result, the YYEA coordinator and other partners proposed to several major local funders to create the "B-Side" (the business side). The B-Side model would engage in micro-lending, development of entrepreneurial skills, and provision of a youth-centered space, employing youth leadership. The YYEA coordinator and partners discussed the creation of the B-Side with mixed emotions, being sad that it will lose YYEA's advocacy and civic engagement focus but also excited for an opportunity to develop future business leaders. Regardless, all agreed that this was a necessary shift in order to find funding and respond to community priorities. As one adult leader said:

The B-Side is a project that morphed out of YYEA. It has undertones of being youth driven and to some extent youth led. Its purpose is to develop entrepreneurial skills of youth in the area. This is what the youth in the community said they wanted. It will not just try to find jobs for youth, but will develop skills that youth need to have for a lifetime.

A youth board member said:

I think the B-Side will be here next year. We want sustainability. We don't have to have YYEA exactly but something like it. We need to do what we need to in order to get money. But we must stay committed to youth. New youth are coming up, so we must educate each other and keep going with it.

At the same time, YYEA youth members strongly advocated for a continued project focused on youth civic engagement. According to the coordinator:

Those two girls were at the table trying to tease out where YYEA can go from here. The girls did not want to see this program fizzle away. They insisted that it last, saying that it is critical for the community. And they said that it would be cool to have a YYEA graduate run the program.

Therefore, although the coordinators and some former partners will pursue the B-Side, YYEA will continue with its current name and mission as part of the Academic Service-Learning Department at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), thanks to the efforts of some motivated youth board members. These youth have a deep a commitment to civic engagement and did not want to see the YYEA dissipate as it transitioned into the B-Side. As such, the EMU partner was able to find agreement from the university to house YYEA and planned to enlist a former youth board member enrolled at EMU to be the YYEA coordinator. The EMU partner said:

> *YYEA will be sustained in my office. The youth said that they do not want it to transition into the B-Side. That is not why they joined the board. I said, "If you believe that, we will continue it in EMU." [Youth board member] will be the EMU student that will work on YYEA…YYEA might do some work in conjunction with B-Side. But YYEA will do more of the advocating for schools and transportation…YYEA will be civic oriented. It will be about being a good citizen.*

Lessons Learned

The experience and successes of YYEA in bringing youth voice to Ypsilanti provide relevant lessons for communities trying to implement a YIF model in a community where little prior youth engagement has occurred.

Achieving Tangible Outcomes

Concrete, tangible activities and goals can both help youth boards with recruitment and sustain interest among young people and the community. For example, the talent show that YYEA organized was aligned with the board's goal of fostering interaction between Ypsilanti-area schools, and it also provided a visible event in which young people could become involved and see successes of their work. Identifying these concrete outcomes early in the process can be especially effective for recruitment and visibility. As one YYEA member explained:

> *We can go out recruiting, but if there is no tangible thing of what the board is and does, then we can't hold their attention. We need to show other youth something that they are interested in.*

Another young person added:

> *The youth board must have its goal set early. It needs to know what to accomplish first. We must know this for later success. Then we must get the word out to the youth.*

Balancing Youth and Adult Roles

It is also important that these tangible issues be youth driven and focused on youth-identified issues that resonate with young people in the community. According to one adult

partner, "Make sure that the youth drive the boards. Be on their page. Listen to them." Another adult partner noted:

> *Showcasing the kids is the key.… The kids did much of it on their own, and it shows. It is all about putting kids in the right place at the right time and letting them talk. YYEA lived the youth-voice model.*

At the same time, adult leadership is important to a youth board's success, and the two Ypsilanti coordinators suggested that having two co-leaders is a good model. In particular, having two co-leaders is best when the partnership results in at least one having strong interpersonal skills to build relationships with youth and another having skills in marketing and networking. They said that running any non-profit requires the leader to wear many hats, so having two coordinators makes it more feasible to address all the organization's needs. Furthermore, one coordinator said that youth can get multiple perspectives and draw on more relationships if there are multiple coordinators.

> *Leadership is important, since that sets the tone. We need to be energetic and dynamic. And leaders need to be able to network and be savvy with all the players at all levels. Two of us works because we can fill in the gaps…This job is not for one person. It takes two. We wear so many hats. In future cities, there should be two coordinators…Young people also need to have more than one person to talk with. They come to each of us for different issues. We complement each other's strengths and weaknesses.*

Embracing Challenges

Understanding that the work of youth civic engagement is not easy and may not lead to rapid change is essential in maintaining the motivation of both adult leaders and young people. With this awareness, adult coordinators can recruit and design activities to maintain the interest and commitment of young people from many sectors of the community, including those who are often most challenging to recruit:

> *Youth board work is not always fun. This is hard work for the youth. Boards typically draw committed and motivated youth right off the bat. But it is good to keep the board diverse. The ones who wouldn't think of being on the board are the ones who need it. This is the challenge: to engage the unengaged.*

The local political and cultural context can also pose challenges for the board's work, and being aware of the local politics and history can help youth and their adult partners advance the board's agenda. According to a coordinator:

> *Become aware of the formal and informal politics. You have to know the power structures and how they work. For instance, in Ypsilanti there is a racial split. Everything is very black and white. So we had to know this and who had the power in the community. We realized we needed to engage them first. When we enter schools or talk with government leaders, we need to know who has power.*

Targeted and ongoing training for youth can help them to effectively address these challenges. For example, YYEA tapped into the expertise of one of their partners, a faculty member in the communications department at EMU, to prepare youth for their presentations to the Ypsilanti City Council. The partner provided structured training in advocacy and public speaking.

> *For most this was the first time they presented… [They learned] first, you must know what you are talking about. Second, you have to have evidence for support. Third, you need an agenda for next steps that is doable…They went from what can government really do to what do they want to change, who can we partner with to make that change. So it was professional development.*

YYEA members, and other youth, who participated in the community-mapping grant during Phase II also received training in multiple topics, including interviewing, data collection, and data entry, as well as various leadership and communication topics. According to the coordinator:

> *This year all of our energy wasn't into recruiting, so we could put more into development and programming…Every meeting had a different focus — professional development, youth-adult partnership, issue analysis, leadership, and so on. At a retreat we did a lot of public speaking. [Our partners] have helped a lot with that.*

May 2008 update, provided by AED:

10. Looking Across Sites to Distill Core Findings

Implementation of Youth Boards

In Phase II of the YIF initiative, each of the eight sites recruited a core group of young people to the local youth boards. Based on rosters from each site, in the spring of 2006 a total of 117 youth participated on a YIF-funded board across the eight communities; 150 young people were involved in the spring of 2007. The number of youth members at each site ranged from 8 to 24 in 2006 and from 4 to 30 in 2007, with an average of 14 and 19 youth board members in 2006 and 2007, respectively. Overall, nearly 60 percent of youth members from 2006 remained involved in the initiative in 2007, with retention varying from 42 to 77 percent across sites.

Survey findings suggest that the youth board members tended to be engaged and motivated to contribute to their boards in Phase II. Eighty-five percent of youth members reported attending all or most of their board meetings. The high attendance rate was consistent across all sites; in seven of the eight sites, more than 75 percent of the youth members reported participating in all or most of the meetings.

Characteristics of Youth Board Members

As illustrated in Exhibit 1, across the eight sites, youth board members responding to surveys were predominately female and most likely to identify themselves as either Black/African-American or White/Caucasian. The youth boards also tended to attract students who were in the eleventh and twelfth grades and who had experience participating in community or school organizations not related to the YIF. Almost all youth (94 percent) participated in other organizations before, during, or after school hours, and about half had a family member who engaged in volunteer activities. The majority of youth board members attended a public, non-magnet, or charter school (73 percent).

Youth Board Tasks and Activities

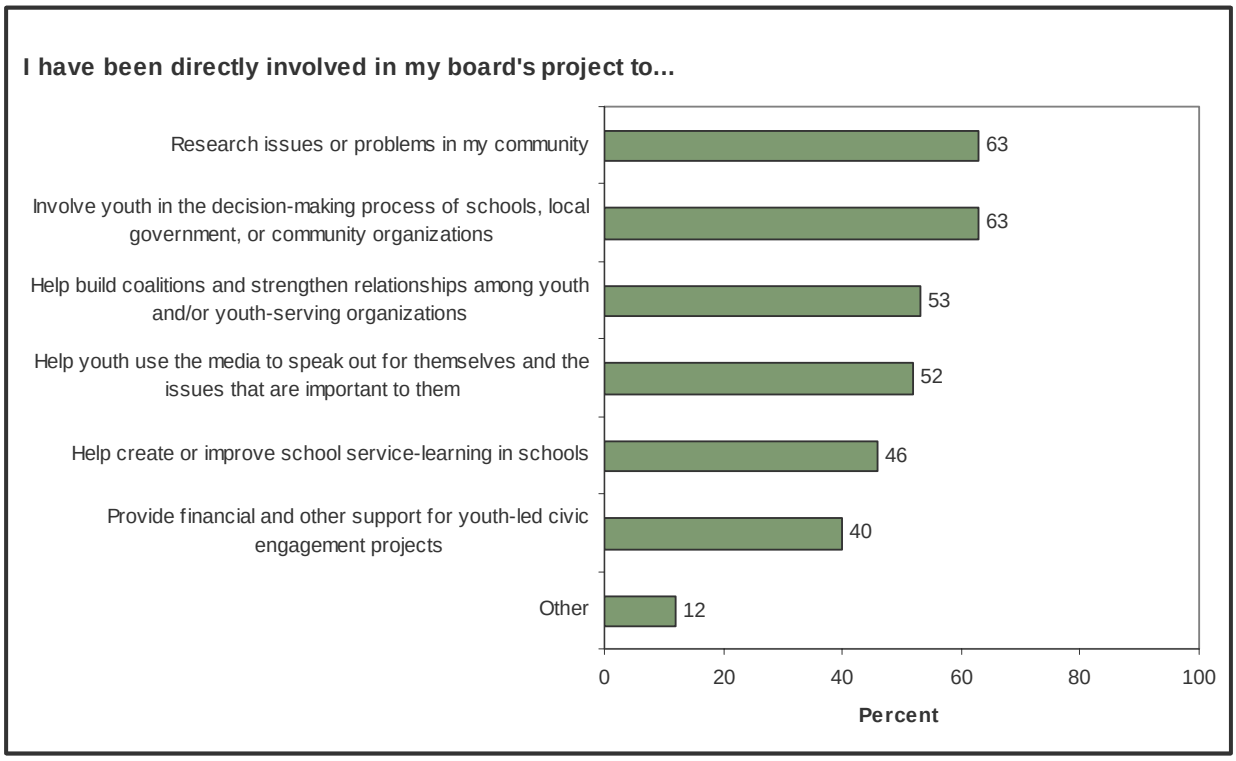
In Phase II, each site developed an impact plan that outlined campaigns that young people would implement to create change in their communities. Recognizing the important role that schools play in shaping the lives of youth and in influencing larger social issues, Phase II activities tended to focus primarily on creating change within local schools by increasing youth voice and representation and augmenting the opportunities and infrastructure for service-learning.

Across all sites and campaigns, as shown in Exhibit 2, young people most frequently reported that they were involved in conducting research of issues or problems in their community (63 percent), increasing the involvement of youth in the decision-making process of the community (63 percent), building coalitions and strengthening relationships among youth and/or youth serving organizations (53 percent), and using media to help youth speak out (52 percent).

Exhibit 1
Youth Board Member Characteristics (n=122)

Youth Board Member Characteristics	Percent
Gender	
Female	62
Male	38
Race/Ethnicity	
Black or African American	46
White or Caucasian	33
Asian	9
Hispanic or Latino(a)	2
Other or mixed race	10
Grade Level	
7^{th}	1
8^{th}	5
9^{th}	13
10^{th}	16
11^{th}	26
12^{th}	30
Other	7
School Type	
Public (not a magnet or charter school)	73
Public (magnet or charter school)	18
Private or other	9
Grades Usually Earned in School	
Mostly As	48
Mostly Bs	36
Mostly Cs	8
Civic Engagement	
Involved in other organizations at school	94
Have served on community or school council (not YIF)	69
Family members involved in volunteering	50

Exhibit 2
Youth Involvement in YIF Activities (n=122)



Effects of the YIF Initiative on Youth

Across all eight sites, respondents reported that participating in the Youth Innovation Fund increased young people's self-efficacy regarding their ability to contribute and make a difference in their communities.

Increased Civic Awareness

Participation in the youth boards gave young people a much better sense of what was happening in their own community and increased their awareness of disparities, needs, and social inequities, setting the stage for civic engagement and action. Youth commented:

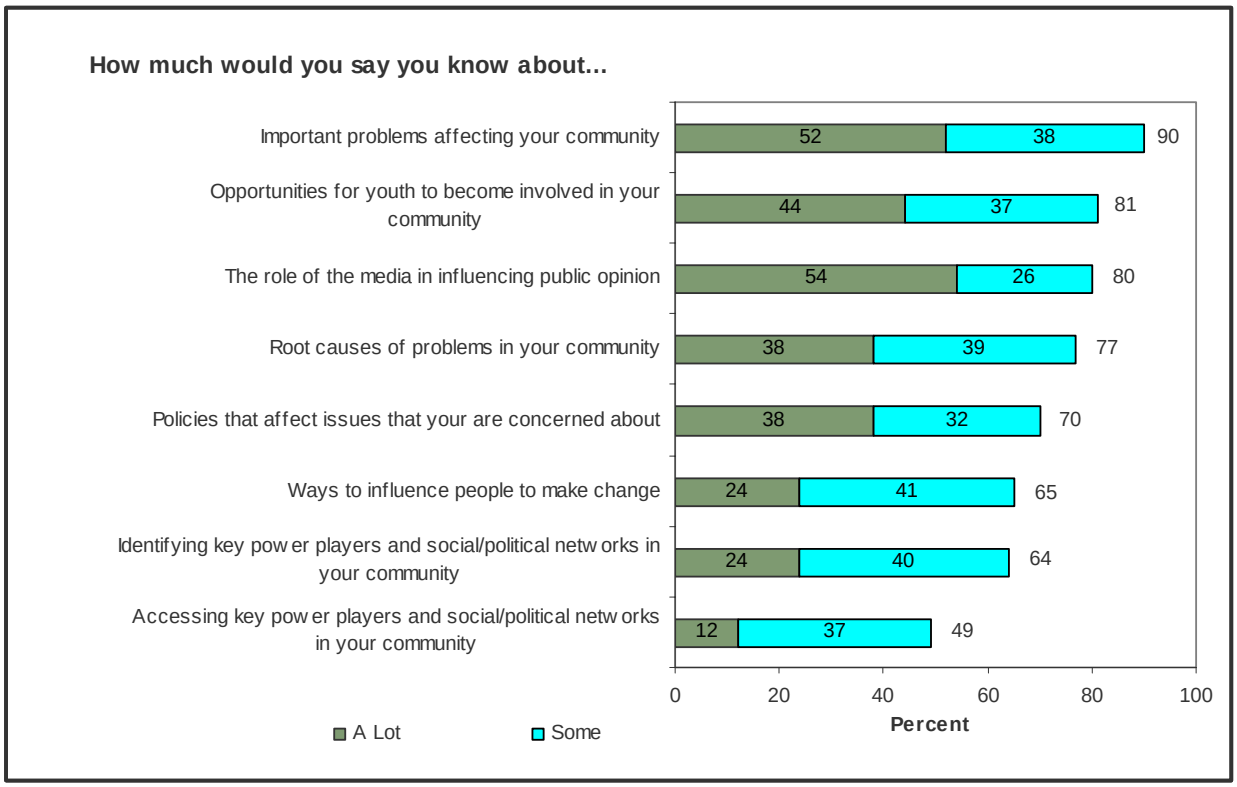
> *I didn't really know about the problems in the community. YOUTHINK opened my eyes to all of the different problems that are going on in Portland, especially those related to youth. – Portland, ME*

I really learned a lot, from going to our workshops, and talking to all of these different kids and seeing what their experiences are. There's no uniform thing that's going on, and I wonder why there [are] so many inequities. – San Francisco

I really saw that there was segregation in the education that people were receiving. It was totally not fair when you looked at it. Students here really see that, the inequity in expectations. – Nashville

Survey results confirmed that young people had high levels of civic knowledge, particularly in terms of their awareness of pressing community issues. As illustrated in Exhibit 3, most young people reported knowing "some" or "a lot" about important problems affecting their community (90 percent), opportunities for youth to become involved their community (81 percent), and the role of the media in influencing public opinion (80 percent). A smaller but significant percent of youth reported high levels of efficacy in being able to reach out to community decision-makers, including: knowing ways to influence people to make change (65 percent), how to identify key power players and social or political networks in their community (64 percent), and how to access these power players and networks (49 percent).

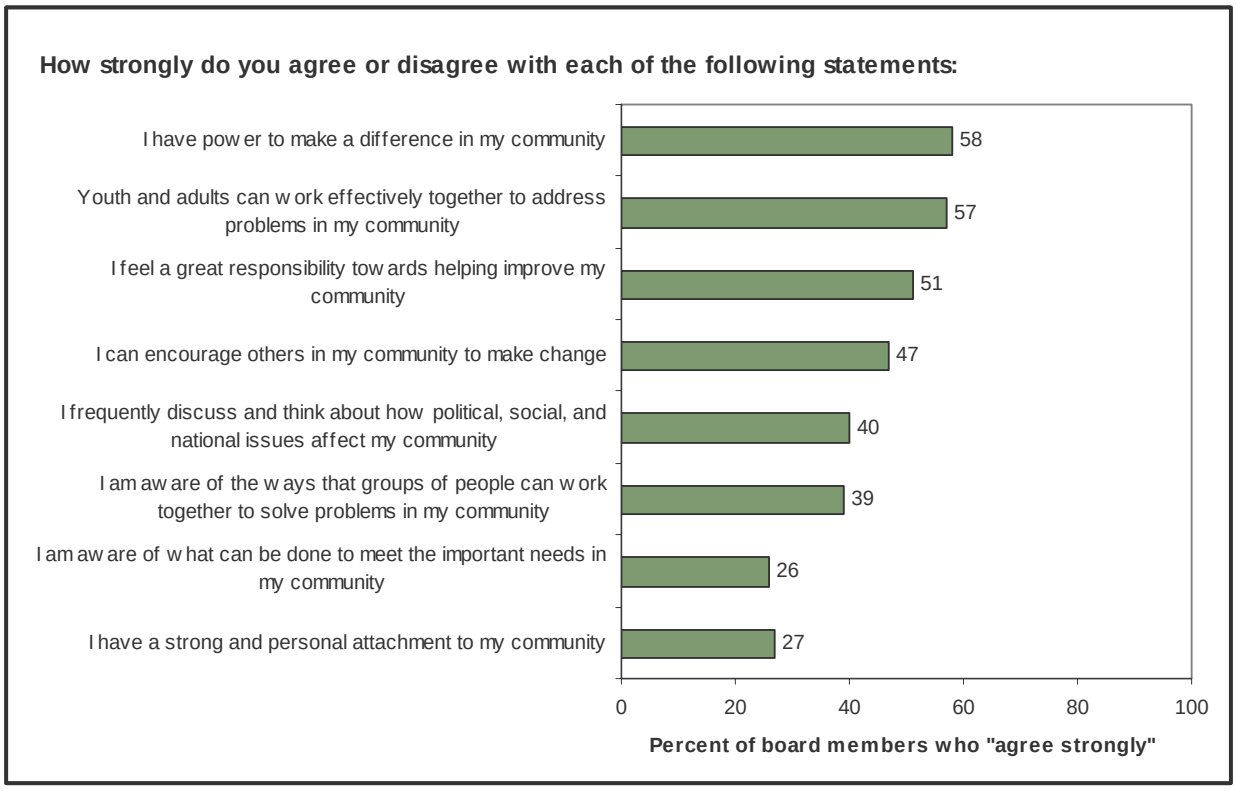
Exhibit 3
Civic Knowledge (n=122)



Sense of Empowerment

Participation also helped young people understand their own capabilities, opportunities, and obligations to promote concrete improvement in their communities. In surveys, as illustrated in Exhibit 4, 58 percent of youth members agreed strongly that they have the power to make a difference in their community. Youth also agreed strongly that they were able to work with adults to address community problems (58 percent), believed that youth and adults can work effectively together to address community problems (57 percent), felt a great responsibility towards improving their community (51 percent), and believed that they could encourage others in the community to make a change (47 percent).

Exhibit 4
Civic Empowerment (n=122)



Interviews with youth and adult partners supported findings about the sense of empowerment that young people developed through their participation in the YIF:

> *Before I was involved with this board, I felt like youth weren't able to solve problems because adults solved most of those issues in communities. After being a member, I realized that youth are extremely important to the community because we are the ones who give information to the adults… It's kind of like the youths are the start and adults come in the middle, [and] we all bond together at the end to finish. – San Francisco*

I used to just fuss at the TV about what was going on, but now I can do something about it. It helped me to be outspoken. – Hampton

To empower youth and to make youth believe that they have power – to arm them with the power that they already have and to encourage them to exercise that power and not accept things at face value. I think it's a reasonable goal for humanity at large, and it's great that we can start that kind of thing here. – Portland, ME

The adult partners also pointed to a greater sense of efficacy and engagement among youth participants, noting that they had seen a transformation in young people's awareness and ability to change their communities:

What I've heard [youth] say is, "I realized that if something was going to get done, I had to do it. Things don't just happen, people do them. I might be one of those people." – Nashville

I see that they are now much more excited about what they're doing now. They didn't know that they could have a voice. Now, they may see a manifestation of what they say come to pass. – Cleveland, MS

Commitment to the Community

Participation in YIF youth boards increased young people's commitment to the communities in which they live, which can be expected to lead to longer-term civic engagement and community change. Youth commented:

Now I believe it is important to get involved in the community that is your home. You should make a legacy of it. You can get involved in the politics, and even be the mayor if you apply yourself. You can make your community a better place. I think you have to try the best you can now to get ready for later on. – Ypsilanti

I think that before CYC, I wanted to get away from here, but the CYC opened my eyes to what the community needs and made me want to come back. I still want to get away and see the world, but I want to come back. – Cleveland, MS

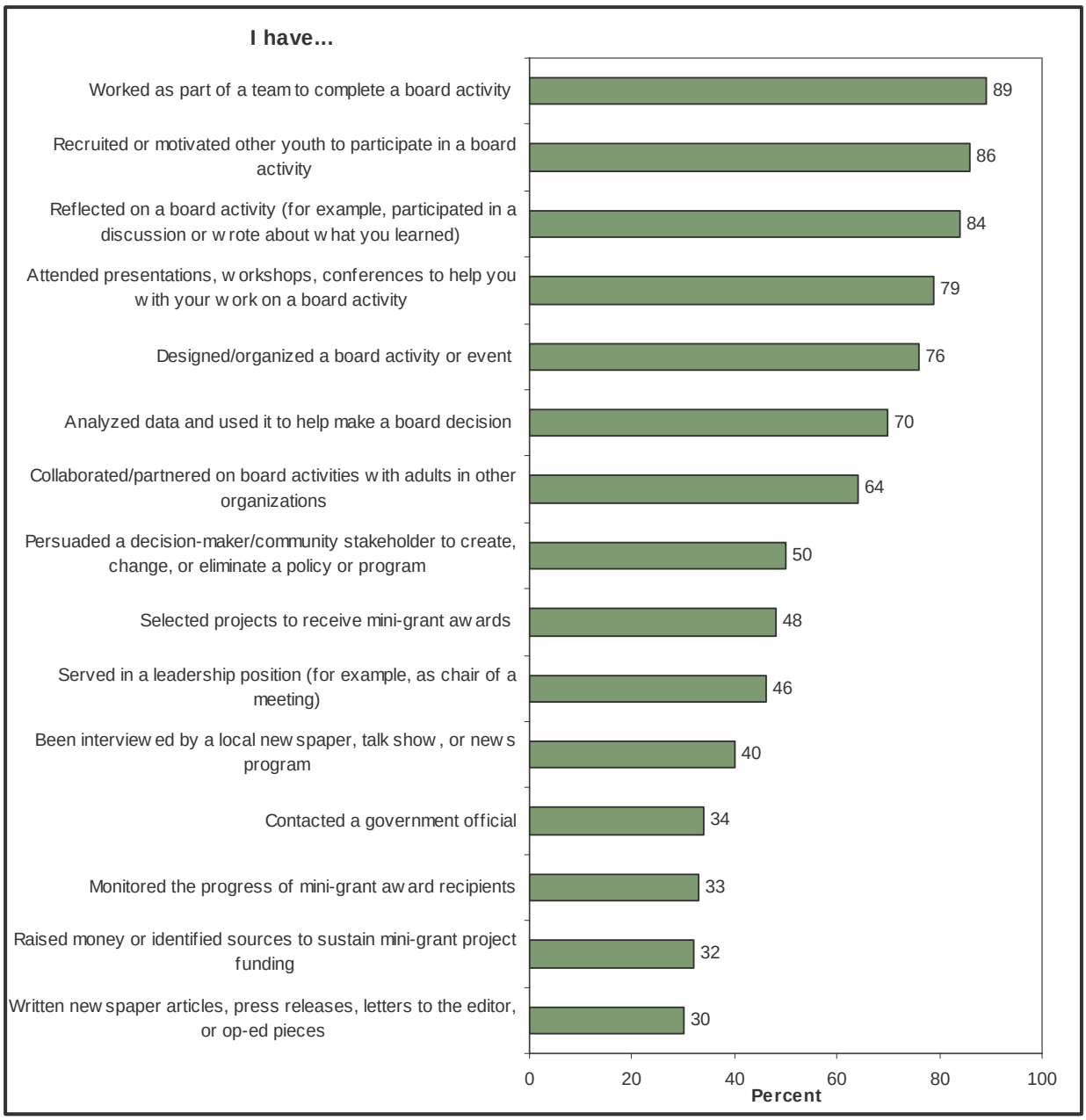
Skill Development

Perhaps the biggest and most consistent effect on youth was the concrete leadership skills they learned. The development of these skills has been identified by previous research as being a key element leading to continued engagement in activism among youth (Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001).

As shown in Exhibit 5, more than three-quarters of young people worked as part of team to complete a board activity (89 percent), recruited other youth (86 percent), reflected on board

activities (84 percent), attended presentations, workshops, or conferences (79 percent), and designed or organized a youth board activity (76 percent). Reflecting the range of strategies employed by each site in Phase II, fewer reported having monitored the progress of mini-grant award recipients (33 percent), raised money to sustain mini-grant project funding (32 percent), or written newspaper articles (30 percent).

Exhibit 5
Youth Participation in Skill-Building Activities (n=122)



Youth and their adult partners put significant effort into, for example, developing presentation skills prior to speaking with city or district leaders. This process leading up to and including presentations resulted in concrete new communication skills. Thanks to targeted training efforts by adult partners and practice through youth board activities, respondents frequently noted that young people gained strong presentation skills:

> *I've called schools, supervisors for all districts. They ask us questions, and I get nervous, but it helped me develop a lot of public-speaking skills. – San Francisco*

> *I do feel more comfortable talking to people in power. Now I talk to community members in power all the time and to speak to them in a way where they will listen. – Hampton*

Adult partners also highlighted the improvements in young people's presentation and public speaking skills:

> *In terms of skills, students come away with more confidence, especially in public speaking skills and more confidence in having hard conversations… – Portland, ME.*

> *Their presentation skills were off the chart. We had a 45 minute presentation from seven or eight members of the YIB… Without notes and without needing to refer to documents, except for the slide behind them, they could sit there and tell you what happened [in the data], and why it was happening… It was a very good, professional presentation. – Nashville*

Political Advocacy Knowledge and Skills

Youth in many cities developed a deep understanding of the political process, including the persistence, dedication, and organization needed to advance a civic agenda and make change:

> *Dedication and consistency are key. You also have to be educated on your community. Start by knowing what you want to get out of your efforts. Know who you need to talk with to get your agenda carried out. And be willing to take others' suggestions and work with them. You have to build your coalition and may need to compromise. – Ypsilanti*

Adult partners concurred:

> *[To get access to city council] they found the right political levers to pull. They played politics to advance their issue. First, they got the lay of the land and found which council members they needed to lobby. They built a coalition. And they went to the council and got their message out. Now they have opened huge doors. This has never been done by youth around here before. – Ypsilanti*

> *I think that they have a much deeper understanding of the complexity of issues and of the need for organization and preparation. Just because you have an idea doesn't mean it is*

going anywhere. They have a much better grasp of preparation, presentation, and acting. They have gone through the process. – Chicago

Effects on Communities

Increased Youth Voice in School Districts

In Phase II of the YIF initiative, young people in several cities made impressive progress toward increasing the visibility of youth and the value attached to youth voice in decision-making in their school districts. For example, the Chicago YIF board formed an advisory council to the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools and was invited to meet on a quarterly basis with the CEO. The young people targeted security training as a priority, which became a way to gain credibility with the CEO and to demonstrate the ways in which young people could contribute to improving youth experience in the Chicago Public Schools. As a result, the CEO invited members of the YIF to participate in the annual back-to-school training for security personnel.

In Cleveland, MS, the Cleveland Youth Council (CYC) began to establish youth governance capacities in the school district. The CYC piloted a superintendent's youth advisory council and a principal's advisory council at one of the high schools. One adult partner explained the magnitude of this step:

The superintendent has youth on an advisory board. I think that has been a great change. We're in an area where people believe youth should be seen and not heard. So, that's been a huge shift in organizational culture.

In Nashville, the Youth Innovation Board publicized findings from its large-scale data collection and analysis effort — including surveys of more than 8,000 Nashville students — by presenting their report *Separate and Unequal* to the school district leadership. This controversial report highlighted differences in survey responses between students in magnet schools and students in regular comprehensive high schools and drove home the disparities in educational opportunities across the city. The report ultimately sparked a much-needed public discussion in the city about the need for equality in educational opportunities.

Increased Youth Voice in the Community

In Phase II, the boards formed and expanded community relationships to permit changes in the role of youth in community policy and decision-making. The Ypsilanti Youth Empowered to Act (YYEA) board encouraged the city council to increase the involvement of youth. The city council gave serious consideration to the YYEA agenda, and YYEA board members developed authentic relationships with influential leaders in the community. YYEA's advocacy work encouraged the city council to add four new seats to the Parks and Recreation Commission that were explicitly reserved for youth.

In Cleveland, the CYC's continued record of engagement earned youth a voice with key figures in the community who began to see them as valued constituents who should be involved in decision-making. Adult partners said that in the most recent local election, candidates made it a point to talk with the CYC youth. This respect was earned in part because of the youth's demonstrated knowledge of civic issues in the community. One adult member said, "[Youth] have provoked social change. People are coming to the table who haven't talked to us before."

Youth as Organizers and Conveners

Through their ongoing efforts to convene partners and publicize their efforts and the importance of youth engagement, the young people involved in youth boards in several communities came to be seen by the end of Phase II as experts in youth organizing and were called on to share their expertise with other youth councils and agencies.

For example, Nashville's Youth Innovation Board provided civic action training to approximately 150 youth from seven of Nashville's youth boards and councils. In Ypsilanti, YYEA youth were recognized in the community as being experts on youth voice who could share their knowledge as consultants. The persistent efforts and ongoing collaboration among youth, community agencies, and cities or schools gradually led to the development of models of youth participation and greater acceptance of youth input. In Chicago, for instance, the coordinator noted:

> *It's become the norm now to ask for youth input. So I think the long-term impact is creating a powerful youth council model that can be replicated at the school level and within city departments. City and youth service departments [have] called and asked how we could help with their youth council.*

Serving as conveners and advocates for youth voice was not easy work. The Youth Innovation Fund, San Francisco board served as a convener to bring other youth engagement organizations together. However, maintaining the coalition of organizations was a challenge. Although organizations were interested in connecting with each other, the coordinator noted that "people are already committed to their organizations; they have limited time." Organizations showed interest but needed to be engaged regularly, and relationships needed to be actively maintained.

Increased Opportunities for Service-Learning

Although youth boards experienced mixed success in this area, board members learned how to make the case for service-learning, mobilize support for their position, and push for adoption of increased service-learning opportunities. Members of Hampton's Uth ACT board conducted a series of meetings with the superintendent and assistant superintendent of schools to advocate for service-learning in Hampton schools. In conjunction with the lobbying efforts of their adult partners, Uth ACT students made a presentation to the superintendent on the benefits of service-learning and conducted a survey among local students to demonstrate popular support

for such a curriculum. As a result, the superintendent decided to support the implementation of a service-learning curriculum in pilot classes in the eighth grade, with plans to subsequently expand the curriculum to high schools.

Other sites, however, encountered resistance in moving service-learning efforts forward. For example, in Portland, ME, the YOUTHINK board led efforts to promote the integration of service-learning into the high school curriculum by promoting awareness among teachers and administrators and strategizing ways of making service-learning an integral part of teaching and learning in Portland Public Schools. However, although YOUTHINK presented their service-learning proposal, action was not taken by the district.

The young people of Portland, OR, also wrote a white paper that described a plan for service-learning in the high schools and presented it to the Portland Public Schools. But, as in Maine, the board "struggled to gain traction about service-learning work."

Improved Portrayal of Youth in the Media

Youth engaged and used many forms of media for the purpose of publicizing youth voice as well as affecting mainstream media attention to and treatment of youth issues. The YOUTHINK group in Portland, ME, led a media watchdog project related to how youth are represented by major media sources. One success was the group's ability to garner attention from the local media. In getting more coverage of their own work, YOUTHINK was, in turn, able to encourage more positive representations of youth in the local press.

> *We continue to have some really strong relationships with reporters at the local newspapers. We have a reputation for getting the best coverage in town. There is always an article in the paper when we do something, and we have had about four or five this year. We are working this summer to create a more systematic way to build these relationships.*

Program Features Linked to Success

Youth Innovation Fund sites were most successful in contributing to changes in youth voice in the community and in developing youth skills when they: adapted to the local context; focused on concrete goals and activities that demonstrated the value of youth engagement; maintained an appropriate balance between youth and adult roles; and provided adequate and specific training for young people.

Adapting to the Local Context

The community's experience with youth voice. The political and cultural context of each of the youth boards varied widely, and the experiences of the boards in establishing themselves in their community depended, in part, on the success of the board in establishing an

identity that both distinguished it from others and was aligned to community dynamics. To be effective, the board's work needed to reflect and build on the needs and interests of the community in which it was established.

Several YIF boards operated in communities that had a long history of youth engagement initiatives or where other youth boards were simultaneously engaged in civic action. The challenge to the YIF boards was to find a platform on which to contribute to the ongoing work of establishing youth engagement in the community without competing for resources or attention from other existing entities. For example, in San Francisco, the youth board struggled to establish itself and form a unique identity in a city with numerous existing opportunities for youth civic engagement, including the Student Advisory Council, which consisted of representatives from each public high school who met bi-monthly with the Board of Education to voice student issues, and a city-sponsored Youth Commission. This was also a concern in Portland, OR, where, simultaneous with the start of Phase II, the new mayor promoted a major initiative to involve youth in government. This initiative garnered much attention and culminated with the development and ratification of a Youth Bill of Rights, making it difficult for the separate YIF-assisted youth board to gain traction.

Hampton also had a history of youth involvement in decision-making including a city-funded Youth Commission. Within this context, the Hampton Uth ACT successfully created a unique role and identity that did not duplicate an existing organization. In Phase II, Uth ACT focused on becoming an advocate and organizer to help other youth leadership groups in Hampton become more proficient in their work. Similarly, metropolitan Nashville had approximately 15 active youth boards, including a Mayor's Youth Council. The Mayor's Office there also organizes a Youth Summit each year, attended by members of all of the youth boards in the city. The Youth Innovation Board (YIB) capitalized on this experience and resources by consulting with other youth boards and sharing ideas and adult expertise. The YIB also realized that it needed to distinguish itself in some way from these other boards, and therefore in Phase II it focused exclusively on the issue of school climate and school culture in Nashville's public high schools.

In contrast, the lack of previous youth civic engagement initiatives posed a different type of challenge in certain sites. For example, in Ypsilanti, few opportunities existed for youth input prior to YYEA. In general, youth were not expected to participate in civic decisions, and several respondents said that many in the community had a negative view of youth. The coordinator explained, "It's not that the adults don't care or that they wouldn't listen. [Youth engagement] is just an after-thought. The whole concept is totally alien to them." Similarly, there had been no substantial history of youth civic engagement and service-learning in Cleveland, MS. In these instances, the youth boards were successful through their broad-based efforts to lay the ground for adult acceptance of youth voice in the school district and community.

The long-term viability of the consortium model. In all eight communities, the roles of consortium members evolved over the course of the initiative due to local needs and changes within the consortium members' own organizations. These changes played out in very different ways in each community, with some organizations coming to the forefront in certain communities and other consortium members dropping out of the consortium entirely elsewhere.

The centrality of local realities made it impossible to draw generalizations about which consortium models were most effective. Even so, all evidence pointed to the overall benefits of the consortium model as a primary vehicle for reaching out to diverse sectors of the local community and the value of both engaging and educating the community about the merits of and practical approaches for promoting youth voice for civic change.

Identifying Concrete Goals and Activities

Within these local contexts, the boards were most successful when they focused on clear goals and well-defined milestones that the youth members, with the help of adult partners, could achieve. While maintaining the broad goals of youth engagement and policy change, developing concrete outreach and communication strategies and tactics motivated youth and improved their effectiveness in achieving civic change. Adult partners recommended planning a big vision and starting small. According to one partner, "I'd tell folks [to] think big, but break it down into feasible, manageable campaigns and movements where youth rally around and build."

Determining concrete, reachable goals early in the initiative could also affect sites' ability to sustain youth engagement work over time. At the end of Phase II, sustainability was a pressing concern for the sites, and they were more confident in their capacity to continue their work when they could point to concrete successes. In Chicago, the board considered how to maintain and institutionalize the Advisory Council to the CEO into policy. Building on this early success, their goal was that Advisory Council would eventually serve as a model for schools and city departments to develop youth-led councils.

Some boards took steps to become independent non-profit organizations in order to maintain their youth-focused missions. For example, the Uth Act board in Hampton aimed to become a separate entity in order to maintain its clear focus on youth voice. Similarly, the YOUTHINK site coordinator in Portland, ME, noted that she believed that it was in the best interest of YOUTHINK to continue to operate independently in order to advance its missions.

Balancing Youth and Adult Roles

Achieving the right balance between youth and adult leadership was a key element in the success of the youth boards. Both were necessary to achieve the ambitious goals that the boards established, with the most effective adult partners serving as mentors, facilitators, and coaches. Effective adult coordinators brought knowledge and oversight to manage the board, develop relationships with other key organizations, and provide access to community organizations and agencies and also to guide and train youth as they learned to become leaders in the community. At the same time, for the initiative to be effective, youth needed to take an active, front-line role in planning activities and meeting with the community leaders. According to an adult partner in Nashville:

> *In a youth-adult partnership, you are saying that the youth are going to do something. That doesn't mean the adults are hands-off, though. It's people working together, some*

of whom are older, and some of whom are younger. In almost any setting, like in a school, young people have least formal power and the least general preparation for making change. You have to be real about that.

In Portland, ME, the youth board achieved success by building in the time to ensure that activities and partnerships were youth-initiated and youth-driven, thanks to the efforts of adult partners who worked with the young people to build their leadership capacity.

In Ypsilanti, YYEA addressed the challenge of balanced youth and adult roles, in part, by hiring an adult co-coordinator and a youth co-coordinator. The older co-coordinator had expertise in marketing and networking, while the younger co-coordinator had the interpersonal skills to reach out to and communicate with the city's youth.

Training Youth Board Members

In Phase II, as young people prepared to deepen their involvement in civic actions in the community and advocate for change in the city or school district, boards created training opportunities for youth to gain confidence and knowledge of specific leadership and presentation skills as well as other skills. Adult partners noted the need for ongoing training to enable the young people to effectively address the challenges of achieving civic change.

YIF boards typically tapped the expertise of partner organizations or relied on the youth leadership capacity of their lead agency. In Chicago, youth members who participated in the Advisory Council to the CEO received training from the lead agency in how to talk to a person in authority, how to organize and articulate ideas in a meeting, and how to prepare for unexpected questions. In Ypsilanti, YYEA engaged the assistance of a university partner to provide structured training in advocacy and public speaking.

Training in some sites also focused on teaching young people practical skills needed for their YIF work. For example, in Hampton, youth working on the *Word!* magazine participated in training on how to research, write, and edit news and feature stories as well as a workshop on media accountability and the portrayal of age and race in the media. In San Francisco, young people were trained in the technical skills related to website development and article writing and editing. Youth board members in Hampton, Nashville, Portland, ME, and Portland, OR, participated in training organized by the national YIF and delivered by the Youth Media Council.

Conclusions

The work of these eight Youth Innovation Fund sites during the second phase of the initiative demonstrates both the promise of engaging young people in civic action and the resources and capacities needed to fulfill that promise. Overall, through the persistence and commitment of the young people and their adult partners, local youth boards lobbied for increased youth voice and power in their schools and communities and established themselves as valuable resources for youth engagement and civic change. They brought social and educational

inequities to the attention of policymakers, and they established ongoing channels of communication and dialogue with civic leaders. This work was not easy, and the boards were challenged to develop strong partnerships with schools, local agencies, and other groups, in order to build a foundation on which to achieve community change.

However, by finding a niche in the community, identifying tangible goals, and providing relevant and ongoing learning opportunities, the boards increased the civic knowledge and capacities of the young people involved and helped them to develop concrete skills that will enable them to continue to be engaged and active citizens and to drive home ongoing needs for social justice and youth voice, as highlighted in the YIF initiative. Through this work, the boards achieved notable civic changes in their cities, especially by documenting inequities and demonstrating the value of youth voice in civic decision-making. As expressed in the Youth Fund's July 2007 statement, the boards, using diverse methods within their very different communities, are succeeding in "changing the way in which youth civic engagement is conceptualized, encouraged, and supported." They also helped to "create permanent systems and structures that will encourage and support youth-directed community change" in the future, as envisioned in the 2007 statement.

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