

From Beneficiary to Active Agent

How Youth-Led Grantmaking Benefits Young People, Their Communities, and the Philanthropic Sector

By Sheryl Seller

Young people know a lot about the challenges, needs, and strengths of their communities, yet typically have little institutionalized, formal power to influence adult community leaders. It is adults who sit on budget and school committees and decide where public dollars will go. It's committees of adults at the local United Way or community foundation who decide how to allocate excess private wealth in the form of charitable dollars or grants, often in ways intended to benefit youth.

In recent years, however, more foundations, philanthropy-serving organizations, schools, and neighborhood institutions have come to see that young people themselves are well positioned to make informed decisions about community needs both now and in the future that belongs to them. As a result, the practice of youth philanthropy has emerged in hundreds of communities and organizations across the United States. Broadly defined, youth philanthropy provides young people money and mentorship to directly fund nonprofit organizations.

Done well, youth philanthropy helps young people develop useful, transferable skills, a sense of efficacy and connection, and a potentially long-lasting inclination for community engagement. This still-evolving practice is

Youth philanthropy provides young people money and mentorship to directly fund nonprofit organizations.



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a particularly promising avenue for the many foundations interested in community-engaged, less hierarchical funding processes.

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Youth philanthropy programs that are purposefully designed to break down historical barriers and deliberately engage youth of color and youth from historically marginalized communities can improve the philanthropic sector by making it more diverse, more inclusive, and informed by the lived experiences and perspectives of young people.

young people. This brief explores the landscape of youth philanthropy in the United States, considering the implications and benefits for youth philanthropists themselves and for social justice grantmaking in particular. This brief aims to (1) provide concrete examples of best practices for supporting young, diverse decision-makers; (2) offer guidance for funders beginning to explore youth philanthropy and for funders who want to expand or deepen support for this practice; and (3) briefly explore the areas of policy and government practice that may help advance youth philanthropy.

Our writing builds upon the small academic research base on civic engagement and giving; qualitative interviews and open-ended focus groups with 12 teenaged philanthropists and 10 program facilitators and adult mentors from across the nation;¹ and the Sillerman Center's leadership and collaboration in the field.² In alignment with the Sillerman Center's mission to "inform and advance social justice philanthropy," we purposefully interviewed young philanthropists and adults in grantmaking programs that value racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity and seek to benefit communities of concentrated poverty, communities of color or communities which have historically been under-resourced.

Youth Philanthropy Practice Is Expanding

As of 2018, there are at least 500 youth philanthropy programs in the United States that have made nearly 3,100 grants totaling over \$12 million, according to Foundation Center's YouthGiving.org. These programs come in a variety of forms and models. Typically a local foundation will provide dollars to a youth philanthropy program, whose members then make grants to what are usually local organizations. Programs are often run from family foundations, community foundations, neighborhood-based organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club, private giving circles, or faith-based institutions such as the Jewish Teen Funders Network.

Youth philanthropy became more common in the late 1980s³ when nonprofit leaders, faced with significant financial struggles, recognized youth involvement as a means to ensure the viability of the nonprofit sector. In

1 Interviewees were either current or former youth philanthropy program directors and facilitators or current or former teenage youth philanthropists. We spoke with constituents from across the United States (Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Michigan, Iowa, Indiana, and California). All youth were asked one set of questions and all adults were asked a different set of questions. These questions can be found at the end of this brief. For privacy, we have not included any interviewee names or program names.

2 Since 2015, the Sillerman Center, in collaboration with Youth Philanthropy Connect and local youth philanthropy constituents, has sponsored and held three annual regional youth philanthropy gatherings. We also presented at Youth Philanthropy Connect's International Youth Philanthropy Conference in 2016. In the summer of 2017 we published a blog on democratic youth philanthropy and served as a panel on a webinar regarding the same, in collaboration with Indiana Philanthropy Alliance and the Youth Philanthropy Initiative of Indiana.

3 Learning to Give, "Youth Philanthropy." <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/youth-philanthropy>

1985, the Community Foundation for National Capital Region, in Washington, D.C., started a youth philanthropy initiative that taught teenagers both how to fundraise and how to make grants. Around the same time, the National Crime Prevention Council,⁴ which began its Youth As Resources pilot project in 1987, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation established similar programs in the Midwest. Not long after this, Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP) formed to help young people develop grantmaking skills. MCFYP celebrated its 20-year anniversary in 2013. The Lilly Endowment helped grow youth philanthropy programs nationally by providing funding to develop organizations such as the Indiana Donors Alliance in 1990, now known as the Indiana Philanthropy Alliance (IPA). In 2001, funders, educators and community leaders established the statewide initiative, Youth Philanthropy Initiative of Indiana (YPII) as a statewide initiative. In 2005, YPII became a signature program of IPA.

As youth philanthropy programs became more common, adults recognized the need for both a national-level information hub and a convenor to coalesce and strengthen the field. In the spring of 2016, the website YouthGiving.org emerged as an informational hub on youth philanthropy. Additionally, Learning to Give, based in Grand Haven, Michigan, offers advice and guidance directly to adults and teachers who support youth givers and those involved in service learning. Both projects promote youth philanthropy generally and elevate best practices within the field.⁵

Youth Philanthropy Challenges Paternalism & Elitism

Much philanthropic practice reflects a vision of youth as vulnerable and “at-risk” at best, and problematic at worst. Failure to engage youth in grantmaking decisions represents a lost opportunity, as communities surely could benefit from the social capital, understanding, cultural knowledge, and creativity young people possess. Perhaps this view of young people mainly as passive “beneficiaries” as opposed to active agents stems from a prevailing notion that young people do not have the proper training or sophistication to contribute to civic life for the wider community. In a study conducted by the Search Institute and Lutheran Brotherhood,⁶ less than half of adults surveyed said it was important to “seek young people’s opinions when making decisions that affect them.”⁷ In the same study, only about half of adults surveyed said they think that youth should be involved in bettering their own communities.

Youth Philanthropy

Facts: 2018

- There are about 500 grantmaking youth philanthropy programs in the United States according to YouthGiving.org. Programs exist within a variety of spaces including family foundations, community foundations, giving circles, faith-based institutions, and after-school programs.
- Youth philanthropy programs exist in 43 of 50 states and Washington, D.C.
- About 40 percent of youth-made grants are allocated to “human services.” Education is the second most common category, followed by health.
- Eighty percent of the nation’s grantmaking youth philanthropy programs engage teens (ages 13-18).
- Based on a scale developed by YouthGiving.org, 88% of grantmaking youth philanthropy programs serving teens (ages 13-18) in the U.S. have a “high” level of engagement; about 5% have a medium level of engagement.

4 Jones, Sarah E., *Long Term Investments in Youth: The Need for Comprehensive Programs for Disadvantaged Young Men in Urban Areas*. Union Institute, Center for Public Policy, 1990.

5 Youth Philanthropy Connect, a former program of the Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation, also stood out nationally as a leader in the field until it was discontinued in 2017.

6 Scales, Peter C., “The Role of Neighborhood and Community in Building Developmental Assets for Children and Youth: A National Study of Social Norms on Young Adults.” *Journal of Community Psychology*, 2001.

7 Zeldin, Shepherd, Linda Camino, and Matthew Calvert. “Toward an Understanding of Youth in Community Governance: Policy Priorities and Research Directions.” *Analise Psicologica* 25, no. 1, 2007.



Research at the college level suggests when youth are involved in their communities, they tend to continue their involvement into adulthood. What's more, such involvement is strongly associated with a sense of belonging and connectedness.⁸ As one teen philanthropist from Iowa told us:

I didn't know what philanthropy was . . . and now that I know what it means and why I do it [I want to] do it forever because [of] the sense of knowing that you are accomplishing so much and it's in your community.

Another teen philanthropist from Pennsylvania concurred, saying:

I really wanted to learn more about the city I live in, the issues that it has and how we can solve the issues. . . . This is my chance to make a bigger impact, not just where I live but outside of where I live so that was really inspiring for me to work here.

As reported by Inside Philanthropy,⁹ the Council on Michigan Foundations,¹⁰ and the Association of Fundraising Professionals,¹¹ youth involved in giving are more likely to stay engaged in philanthropy as adults. Additionally, as researchers concluded in 2007:

8 Parker, Jennifer S., and Laura Bauknight. "Positive Youth Development through Civic Engagement." *Journal of Youth Development* 4, no. 3, 2009. doi:10.5195/jyd.2009.255

9 Marek, Kiersten. *Youth Philanthropy is Growing, Along with the Online Spaces to Support It*. Inside Philanthropy, June 2016.

10 Tice, Karin E. *Leadership, Volunteerism and Giving: A Longitudinal Study of Youth Grantmakers (1993 - 2003)*. Council of Michigan Foundations, 2004.

11 Hahn Falk, Katherine, and L.G. Nissan. *A Vision for and Brief History of Youth Philanthropy*. Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2007.

*Youth are both products and producers, as well as the benefactors and recipients, of the settings in which they engage, and these reciprocal processes provide a basis for their own development as well as others.*¹²

In our interviews, adult facilitators and supporters of youth philanthropy programs commonly observed that the young people with whom they worked remained engaged in their communities and in nonprofit work for several years. Both the young philanthropists and the adults who supported them typically viewed youth philanthropy as beneficial both to the young people and to their communities in the short and long term. As both groups expressed, the practice supports immediate solutions through grants and because youth sustain their engagement long-term, this contributes to constructive change.

And as one former youth philanthropy program manager from Massachusetts noted in our interviews:

The result we have seen is that [our youth philanthropists] go on to college, [and] most of them in their first year, in their college get involved in community service . . . and then, because they have been doing it so long it comes full circle, then they pick jobs that have service and philanthropy as a part of the mission of the organization.

From the perspective of youth philanthropists and adult mentors, the experience of youth-led grantmaking purposefully moves young people away from being mere beneficiaries of grants through three actions:

1. Young people collaboratively co-create an understanding of the social and political landscape of their communities rather than accepting analyses given to them;
2. They collaboratively prioritize a community need from their perspectives.
3. With authority and a sense of ownership, young people take direct action to fill this need.

When we asked young people about how grantmaking “makes them feel,” the most common response was “empowered.”

As Barbara Ferman concluded in her 2005 report on the Youth VOICES program:

*[T]he system, not the young person, is flawed . . . youth, particularly low income, minority youth, have been extremely marginalized, denied basic opportunities such as meaningful and high quality education, and decent and safe living environments, and . . . many youth have internalized this marginalization, behaving in ways that reflect this low level of status and importance.*¹³

Practicing Philanthropy Helps Youth Develop Useful Skills

Youth philanthropists have the opportunity to develop what are often termed “21st century skills” such as teamwork, empathy, synthesis of information, and public presentation. Providing the opportunity to practice philanthropy may be particularly beneficial to underserved youth. As Nancy Erbstein concluded in a 2013 report, “Young people who have been disengaged from or underserved by school and have had limited

12 Zeldin, Shepherd, Linda Camino, and Matthew Calvert. “Toward an Understanding of Youth in Community Governance: Policy Priorities and Research Directions.” *Analise Psicologia* 25, no. 1, 2007.

13 Ferman, Barbara. “Youth Civic Engagement in Practice: The Youth VOICES Program.” *The Good Society* 14, no. 3, 2005.

opportunity to develop skills such as academic literacy, public speaking, writing, project planning, and meeting participation are likely to require significant additional skill-building support.”¹⁴

As a model of youth development, philanthropy helps young people develop these skills through activities such as writing requests for proposals, actively participating in site visits, researching and learning about the history of philanthropy and nonprofits, and learning to negotiate with team members in decision-making processes.

As a youth philanthropist in San Francisco explains:

Now I am more outspoken, and I can talk in front of people without getting red and nervous. I learned how to work well with people . . . and communicate with others . . . about meetings and things like that.

Young people we interviewed consistently reported increased “empathy,” and among group members, a growing “culture of caring.” Youth and their adult supporters frequently cited the strengthening of skills such as collaboration and teamwork as a benefit of youth philanthropy. One teenager involved with a program in Pennsylvania echoed this:

I think we are 11 really passionate people. And sometimes that can be good, and sometimes that can be really bad. So we’ve really had to navigate how to listen to each other’s voice and work cohesively.

Similarly, a program director in New York noted that students often tell her:

Things like, “I’ve worked in groups my whole life but this is the first time I have ever actually really worked in a group because we really all had to come together, we had something that we really needed to decide on collectively and we figured out how to do it.”

Equity-centered youth philanthropy is one avenue through which grantmaking can become more democratic, more community-engaged, and more responsive to—and better informed by—a diversity of voices and experiences.

The Philanthropic Sector Benefits from Youth Philanthropy & Can Support It in a Variety of Ways

In recent years, several organizations have worked to advance equity and diversity within the philanthropic sector. In 2017, the funder network CHANGE Philanthropy held a major summit in New Orleans. The organization, which includes seven core partners who are funder affinity groups and philanthropy-serving organizations, called on foundations to connect more directly and meaningfully to communities, to direct more resources to underserved communities, and to incorporate the lived experiences of community members into grantmaking strategy. This conference, according to organizers, was “the largest and most diverse convening of progressive funders in philanthropic history,” and it “examined and challenged how philanthropy engages, addresses, and invests in diverse impact within communities.”¹⁵

14 Erstein, Nancy. “Engaging Underrepresented Youth Populations in Community Youth Development: Tapping Social Capital as a Critical Resource.” *New Directions for Youth Development* 138, 2013.

15 CHANGE Philanthropy: Unity Summit, 2017

We believe that equity-centered youth philanthropy is one avenue through which grantmaking can become more democratic, more community-engaged, and more responsive to—and better informed by—a diversity of voices and experiences.

Youth philanthropy support can be added easily to existing programs and portfolios, through partnerships with community-based foundations or other community-based programs. Toolkits and blog posts from YouthGiving.org offer some practical advice for starting a youth philanthropy program. Support for youth philanthropy is aligned with foundation portfolios focused on youth, leadership development or community engagement.

High Quality Youth Philanthropy Programs Prioritize Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and Balance Youth Support with Youth Autonomy

Prioritize Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

A commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion requires not only that resources are distributed fairly but that decision-making power about how to spend those resources is also shared. Youth philanthropy provides a potential route for doing just that. In order to fulfill this aspiration, however, funders, program directors, and participants must identify and eliminate barriers to participation, particularly for underserved youth in communities of concentrated disadvantage.

Without purposeful attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion, expanding youth philanthropy practice could serve to widen inequality by providing only youth with family wealth the opportunity to make grants. Attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion also helps to break down a long-standing culture of distrust between youth and adults as well as manifestations of racial bias in grantmaking more generally.¹⁷

It is important for adults in youth philanthropy programs to deeply understand the demographics of the region or community in which they are working. Program leaders need to ensure that the demographics of their program reflect the racial and socioeconomic makeup of youth in the community. If youth of color or youth from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds aren't represented in a program, it may be helpful for program administrators to systematically identify barriers to participation for these young people. This might include reviewing existing admission guidelines or developing stronger partnerships with school leaders or community-based organizations in historically marginalized communities. Program leaders and young people agreed that getting school counselors and teachers to encourage participation would increase interest and help

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16 We recommend reviewing: GrantCraft's "Where in the World of Youth Philanthropy Do I Get Started," 2016; Sammie Holzworth's "How Do I Start a Youth Grantmaking Program in My Community?," 2016; and Luke Sturtz's article "What Should You Focus on When Creating a New Program or Revamping Your Current One?," YouthGiving.org, 2016.

17 For more on trust-building and adult-youth relationships in the field of philanthropy, we recommend reviewing "Young, Gifted, and Underfunded: Strengthening the Relationship Between Philanthropy and Youth-Led Movements," a white paper produced by the Open Society Institute in Baltimore in 2017.



ensure that it is not just students already involved in civic volunteering who show up. This is vital, students said, especially if the program is not based at a school, but resides in the community.

For all youth philanthropy programs, it is crucial that curricula address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and also historical discrimination and power. One program facilitator from New York explained the importance of integrating DEI into the curriculum of a particularly privileged high school:

Because they are high school students often coming from very privileged environments—whether that’s socioeconomically, racially, geographically, all of the above—plus, it is often the first time that they are even understanding what the concept of privilege is, what the concept of equity really is about. And that there are discrepancies, that there are differences in the world that are connected to larger systems. You know, we read a lot of articles, we do a lot of watching, I incorporate a lot of things like spoken word performances and things that are really engaging for young people to try to make the concept that we are talking about—diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice—more accessible to them so it doesn’t feel like school.

Significant barriers to diverse and inclusive youth philanthropy participation need to be broken down.

Funders who support youth philanthropy should consider providing grant dollars not only to be given away by youth participants to others, but for youth participants themselves to pay for transit to and from a program, to pay for meals, and even to be paid for their time and expertise. If programs are to be truly inclusive, they must compensate young people at a competitive rate to offset time that would otherwise be spent in after-school or summer jobs. Household income, including youth income, often is directly spent on basic needs.

As one former program director from San Francisco explained:

You know, most people that apply to our program are applying because they need a job and not because they are interested in philanthropy, and we acknowledge that from the beginning.

Some of the programs we explored did provide transportation money to youth participants. Young people reported that this allowed them access to the program, as well as ensured their ability to stay in it.

Additionally, all of the programs we explored have some sort of application and interview process, even if that process is simple or used merely to gauge interest. However, as one program director noted, “The application process disadvantages and biases towards one set of students.” Such students tend to be those traditionally excluded from philanthropy spaces to begin with. Further, students from less affluent schools might lack resources, such as counselors and advisers, that wealthier schools have. Building a diverse, inclusive, and equitable youth philanthropy program takes significant time and effort, but is vital for both youth and community development.

As one youth philanthropist from Pennsylvania said:

I think a lot of people out here are just surviving, you know. So they don't really got time to be like, oh, let me just write this essay up, let me just get my resume together, let me go get somebody to check this all out for me, let me get my references together.

Program directors and young philanthropists note that it is crucial that grade point averages and writing skills not be used as the basis for participation in a program. Basing entry into the program on these factors will exclude students who may perform poorly in school due to life challenges or because they are still learning English or adjusting to a new home or a new school system altogether. These skills are not necessarily correlated with being an effective youth philanthropist. Some program managers report interviewing every person who applies to the program. This provides valuable interviewing experience, improves program access, and provides a way to spread the word about the program. And more importantly, it recognizes that youth possess diverse equally valuable qualities and provides them with a chance to display their own strengths.

Balance Youth Support & Youth Decision-Making

In order to build a sense of ownership and practice informed grantmaking, youth must have autonomy and decision-making power in their youth philanthropy programs. As one young philanthropist from Maryland said:

Just because you're young doesn't mean that you don't care about the world or don't have questions about the big problems that society is facing, and that you don't have valuable answers.

In our conversations, youth and adults expressed clearly that youth should be trusted community voices and partners. Autonomy was achieved and valued by program participants perhaps partly because in the youth philanthropy programs where we conducted interviews, young people tended to stay for multiple sessions. On average, youth tended to stay in their programs for at least 3 grantmaking or program cycles. This kind of longevity, participants perceived, engenders trust among the students and between the students and the adult staff and mentors. To

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ensure such longevity, both adults and youth philanthropists suggest that participants be provided room to follow their individual passions and interests. Thus, as part of the grantmaking process, young people should be encouraged to think about and discuss their values and beliefs and use these, as well as their deep understanding of their communities, to create change through their work and funding. As noted by a program facilitator in New York:

[I]f you don't feel passionate about it, it is going to be very hard to sustain your time commitment. Because philanthropy is often—it is a volunteer type of engagement, right, it's not a job, and so if it's something that goes along with your own personal values and passions it will make it easier to sustain the process which is sometimes time consuming.

As one program director from San Francisco explained, it is vital that a youth philanthropy program demonstrates an understanding of youth culture and modes of communication, which helps build a sense of belonging and ownership. This could be anything from the office decor to communication through social media instead of email. This idea was confirmed by a young philanthropist from the same San Francisco-based program. She described her first impression of her youth philanthropy program, which purposefully tried to provide a sense of belonging and create trust:

And it just instantly felt like we were all a family, and not all of us knew exactly what we were doing. When we got the hang of it, it felt like we were all coming together to do something for the community.

Once that sense of ownership and responsibility is established, adult program leaders and young philanthropists agreed that young people should hold ultimate decision-making power as to how money is spent. Adults, then, are there to introduce youth to philanthropy and nonprofit work, answer questions, facilitate conversation, and help when asked. One program director from Massachusetts describes his sense of what youth need from adult leaders:

Well they need . . . to find an educator that will back them. They need somebody that'll help facilitate what they are attempting to do. I mean youth can't do it all themselves . . . [They need a facilitator] who is active and passionate in supporting their quest for youth philanthropy.

The words of one youth philanthropist based in Michigan echoed comments from their peers:

We need to be the voice and symbol of youth in the community. We can't let adults make all the decisions for us.

Another young philanthropist from North Carolina advised adults to:

just to be hands-off with it, give the youth the time to struggle and try to figure things out themselves and help when they need, but just how to take your hands off, let them try to work through their problems.

A program director from Massachusetts suggested a peer learning model where youth who have already participated in the programs take leadership roles as guides to newer members. Having a leadership role may also inspire a young person to remain in a program for more than one grantmaking cycle.

Collaboration is vital within and between youth philanthropy programs

Collaboration in the field of youth philanthropy should be done in a number of ways. First, the members of a single program should have the opportunity to work together and learn from one another. Additionally,

members of different youth philanthropy programs would ideally have the opportunity to collaborate and learn from each other, just as foundation professionals do. Finally, youth philanthropists would also benefit from collaborative relationships with constituents in their communities, including leaders and staff at local nonprofit organizations. There seems to be wide variation in the programs we explored, though all youth expressed a desire for more collaboration with other programs and a desire for deeper relationships and opportunities for collaboration with nonprofit organizations in their communities. As one young philanthropist from Philadelphia said:

The big picture is the betterment of the world around us and I feel that if we are able to collaborate together and work together to better our programs, it's only going to create a better world for the rest of us.

To ensure that grantmaking programs are benefiting the community, it is vital that program participants conduct some form of a needs assessment. Enhancing a young person's understanding of their community as they map assets and needs can help build confidence and a deep connection to the place where they live and learn. Some programs we explored conduct community tours, which incorporate interviews and visits with key informants in community-based organizations. This experience is often elucidating for young people, while providing the context necessary for informed grantmaking.

Sometimes, a financial sponsor will restrict the giving of a youth philanthropy program by requiring young people to make grants aligned with the financial sponsor's current giving areas. In such a case, young people, at a minimum, should connect directly with relevant nonprofit organizations and work closely with them rather than merely choosing from a list with minimal real-life engagement.

There Is a Moderately Supportive Political/Policy Context for Youth Philanthropy

A few current national policies and service-learning initiatives could be supportive structures and potential points of collaboration and allyship for youth philanthropy practice. The values underlying youth philanthropy programs—youth empowerment and development, self-efficacy, community building and service—align with other popular national efforts and policy initiatives. This alignment with long-standing national initiatives may help foundation board members and leaders see the connection between youth philanthropy and other important goals. It also may help philanthropists identify potential public-private partnerships related to youth philanthropy.

According to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Child, youth are “entitled to be active agents in their own lives. It [the Convention] specifically states that all children are capable of expressing a view, and have a right to [do so].”¹⁸ Clearly, youth philanthropy provides an avenue for youth to express their views in a meaningful way.

The values underlying youth philanthropy programs—youth empowerment and development, self-efficacy, community building and service—align with other popular national efforts and policy initiatives.

18 Zeldin, Shepherd, Linda Camino, and Matthew Calvert. “Toward an Understanding of Youth in Community Governance: Policy Priorities and Research Directions.” *Analise Psicologica* 25, no. 1, 2007.



In 1988, Michigan legislators passed a policy to advance the power of youth generally. Public Act 444 lowered the age at which members of a nonprofit board could vote from 18 to 16.¹⁹ At the same time in Michigan, there was an uptick in youth philanthropy programs, likely due to a partnership between the Council on Michigan Foundations and The Kellogg Foundation.

In 1993, through the leadership of President Bill Clinton, Congress passed the National and Community Service Trust Act. This led to the creation of the Corporation for National and Community Service, Americorps, City Year, and other community-service-related initiatives. Youth philanthropy is a natural fit and ally within the larger youth-service community. In 1999, the White House initiative Youth Roundtable on Philanthropy was part of the larger “White House Conference on Philanthropy.”²⁰ During this conference, Clinton administration officials acknowledged the importance of youth voices in giving. President Clinton declared his support of youth philanthropy at the roundtable, stating:

[T]he thing that I got out of all this is that we often think about our obligations to our young people in terms of our education, health care, and other things. But I think systematizing philanthropy, service, and then letting more kids—this Michigan thing, I love this—letting more young people decide how the money they raise is given out, I think, is a very, very good thing to do.

19 Learning to Give: Youth Philanthropy

20 The White House Office of the Press Secretary. “White House Conference on Philanthropy,” October 22, 1999.

On the local level, as of 2014,²¹ only Washington, D.C., and the state of Maryland required that high schoolers complete a certain number of hours of community service in order to graduate. This could conceivably include youth philanthropy and provide justification for expanded youth philanthropy programming. A handful of other municipal policies work to encourage youth philanthropy. San Francisco, for example, has a tax voted into the city's charter that is earmarked for youth development. Youth philanthropy programs in the city benefit from this youth development fund.

Summing Up: Supporting & Expanding the Reach of Inclusive Youth Philanthropy

A quality youth philanthropy program directly benefits the young people who are learning by giving as well as the communities in which the young people live and serve. With attention to equity, diversity, inclusion, and youth autonomy, youth philanthropy offers a potentially powerful counterforce to a culture of paternalism and a check against the disproportionate power provided to elites within professional grantmaking. Drawing upon our research, our interviews, and our experience working with youth philanthropists, we offer a variety of ways that grantmakers can support and enhance youth philanthropy in the United States.

- **Direct grant dollars** given to youth philanthropists provide mentored young people with the opportunity and autonomy to go through the process of assessing needs, aligning needs with personal values, and then making grants to nonprofit organizations.
- Grants to ensure that **diversity, equity, and inclusion** are core parts of youth philanthropy work are well aligned with current priorities within the philanthropic sector.
- **Providing scholarships** to conferences and workshops for youth philanthropists and directors can help to improve their practice. Youth philanthropists express a desire to meet and collaborate with other youth philanthropists outside their communities. This might also serve to nurture youth's interest in philanthropy as a career.
- Program directors and adult educators would benefit from up-to-date **workshops and trainings** in various aspects of philanthropy.
- Professional grantmakers could also provide **in-kind mentorship** to program directors or directly to young people enrolled in youth philanthropy programs.
- There's a need for systematic **research** on the effects of philanthropy on teenagers, particularly underserved youth.
- Foundations can also provide **infrastructure support** to the wider emerging national field. For example, national conveners and information hubs work to increase the reach and influence of youth philanthropy programs, and improve their quality.

21 Education Commission of the States. *50 State Comparison: High School Graduation Requirement or Credit Toward Graduation — Service Learning/Community Service*, January 2014.

Photo credit: Heratch Ekmekjian



Appendix A

Best practices for youth philanthropy programs in the United States: Implementing youth philanthropy programs that are diverse, inclusive, equitable, and democratic in nature

For administrators, adult supporters, funders, and nonprofits:

1. Getting started:

- Outreach is key. If people don't know about a program, they can't participate. Use social media and word of mouth to encourage young people to try the program.
- Diversity and inclusion are vital within programs to make the most significant impact both on the community and on the youth participants. Diversity looks different in different locations and organizations depending upon the demographics of a region.
- Many young people need financial assistance to participate in programs to offset the costs of engagement. Transportation stipends or carpooling can break down significant barriers to access. Programs should provide food.
- Programs require adequate funding to be sustainable and to provide grantmaking activities that positively impact the community and nonprofit organizations.
- Longevity in a program enhances impact. Programs should encourage young people to stay engaged for at least two grantmaking cycles or sessions.
- An application process for program entry is necessary, but it must not hinder young people from diverse or disadvantaged backgrounds from applying. A resume, GPA, and writing sample do not necessarily demonstrate whether a young person is a good fit for a program. An in-person conversation or a creative application component such as a video can be used instead of a formal written application.

2. Increasing democratic processes:

- Improve and increase collaboration of young people who practice philanthropy with their peers, communities, nonprofits, and foundations.
- Encourage and create youth boards, youth grantmaking programs, youth-run councils, or other bodies where youth have equitable decision-making power.
- Provide opportunities for young people to lead in formal meetings about financial decisions.
- Encourage democratic processes such as voting and consensus building.
- Provide hands-on grantmaking opportunities that show impact at two levels:
 - Impact on youth grantmakers
 - Impact at the community level

3. Improving education of adults who work with youth philanthropists:

- Educate teachers, administrators, and nonprofit leaders in ways to start youth philanthropy education, starting at the middle school level.
- Form learning communities for practitioners to share and explore common values, effective models, best practices, and lessons learned. This can be done via conferences, town halls, and meetings.

4. Improving education of youth philanthropists:

- Create youth-friendly online portals as well as physical repositories of informational materials to inform budding youth philanthropists. This may be done through already existing social media platforms such as Facebook.
- Provide training with context: teach the vocabulary of philanthropy, types of philanthropy, case studies of successful campaigns, and lessons about failures of philanthropy and what can be done better.
- Curriculum should include significant discussions on social justice, privilege, and power.
- Encourage and teach leadership development and additional soft skills such as professionalism, team building, public speaking, etc.
- Create engaging educational materials that are a careful balance between academic materials and more youth-friendly mediums such as videos, pamphlets, activities, etc.
- Elaborate on the use of technology in youth philanthropy. Technology should not be used instead of building personal relationships, but rather as a complement, as both strategies are important to this work.

5. Finding connections and networks beyond the usual means:

- Create linkages and collaboration between youth philanthropy groups and programs to bolster networking, ties, learning, and practices.
- Connect emerging young people who practice philanthropy with local nonprofits and educational centers that they might not have early access to otherwise.
- Create alumni networks.

For youth philanthropists:

1. Understanding the community:

- Part of starting a youth grantmaking program is to ask as many questions as possible. It is also okay to start small.
- Become highly educated about the nonprofit landscape and community in which you are working.
- Consider the sustainability of the program. How can a program ensure its longevity?
- Spend time with communities and conduct surveys, informational interviews, and focus groups to understand the needs of the community instead of focusing only on an academic understanding of philanthropy.

- Think about both immediate and long-term community needs.
- Connect with community leaders to roll out a youth philanthropy initiative.
- When possible, include local community members in youth decision-making boards or philanthropy boards.
- Due diligence is important: utilize sites and resources such as Guidestar, Charity Navigator, Foundation Center, Better Business Bureau, etc. Understand the financial and legal restrictions that nonprofits face.
- Be mindful and respectful of the requests you make from nonprofits—whether it be the request for proposal you ask nonprofits to complete, the extensiveness of a site visit, or the post-grant evaluation.
- Provide feedback to your peers and adult constituents. Nonprofits, whether or not they were selected to receive funding, also value feedback.

2. Finding ways to increase collaboration:

- Create monthly nonprofit panels, brown bags, webinars, or meetings to enable conversation between different parties.
- Conduct a robust landscape analysis using websites such as YouthGiving.org to better map the field in order to establish an understanding of current efforts taking place throughout the world. An alternative model could be one that provides a list of organizations looking for youth volunteers, funding, aid with grantmaking, etc., which could be used by youth philanthropists to explore opportunities.
- Create community philanthropy councils of young people and regular convenings at the regional, national, and global levels.
- Find other organizations with a similar focus to create larger networks to improve overall work.

For all youth philanthropy constituents:

1. Improving infrastructure:

- Re-engage public schools in the practice of civic education and service learning.
- Infuse philanthropy into youth culture as well as youth culture into philanthropy.
- Facilitate collaboration as often as possible.
- Promote understanding of the field by educating teachers, administrators, and nonprofit leaders in ways to start youth philanthropy programming early on. Strive to include philanthropy as a part of the curricula in your district. It could be located under a Civics umbrella.
- Increase public awareness by creating links between organizations participating in youth philanthropy to transmit learning and practices.
- Additional research is needed that looks at the long-term benefits of youth philanthropy at the middle school, high school, and college levels.

2. Advocating for policy on youth philanthropy:

- Public policy can and should:
 - Mandate service-learning and civics in school curricula
 - Create a Cabinet-level position for youth
 - Create a Senate committee on youth service
 - Create more youth-driven and youth-run foundations and boards
 - Allow young people to serve on adult boards and have decision-making roles
 - Create more opportunities for young people to produce media

- A focus should be placed on the following areas:
 - Support for youth service
 - Content of programs in youth foundations and boards
 - Youth development research
 - Federal- and state-level funding for youth service work

Appendix B

Interview questions for youth philanthropists

Introduction to the youth philanthropy program

1. Does your youth philanthropy program have an official mission? If yes, do you know what it is? If no, how would you describe the purpose of your program?
2. How does your youth philanthropy group work to achieve this goal?
3. Does your organization fundraise as well as provide grants? If you fundraise, what is an example of a successful fundraising campaign you held? What made it successful and what did you learn from it? If you do not fundraise, where do the funds come from?

Youth-focused questions

4. What inspired you to be a part of this program in the first place? Is being a part of this program what you expected?
5. How does grantmaking make you feel (e.g., empowered, guilty)? Do you feel a greater sense of belonging or more of a connection to your community since participating in this program? What is something you have learned about yourself and community since joining this program?
6. Did you participate in other types of youth civic engagement prior to this? What do you think are some barriers that may stop more people your age from joining youth philanthropy programs?
7. How do you identify the needs of the community where you make grants?
8. How does your group decide what area of interest to focus on when giving money away? Do your own interests and priorities and the areas to which you give grants align?
9. Do you feel connected to the community with which you work? Do you have any ideas about how to improve your community engagement or that of other people your age?
10. What impact have you observed from your work in the community?
11. What skills do you feel you have gained through your work with your youth philanthropy program?

Support-based questions

12. When working with adults, do you feel empowered to make decisions and speak up? How do adults support your work?
13. How does the community view your work?
14. Do you collaborate with other youth philanthropy groups? If not, do you think it would be helpful to have that collaboration?

15. What would improve the support and education of your program?
16. What advice would you give to administrators or adults trying to start or support a youth philanthropy program?
17. What advice would you give to a young person wanting to participate in an organization like yours?
18. How are you recognized for your work by your school, community, or family?

Interview questions for adult supporters (e.g., program directors, instructors)

1. Please state your name, the official program name, and the year the program was founded.
2. What is the mission of your youth philanthropy program? How do you ensure that the program goals are met? On average, how many youth are in your program?
3. How does your program identify community needs and funding priorities? How much money is given away?
4. Does your program offer stipends or other resources to youth to either attend or stay in the program?
5. What is your role within the program?
6. How does your role aid the decision-making and learning for the youth in your program?
7. How does your program ensure diversity, inclusion, and equity?
8. What is the balance between youth voice and adult voice in your program? Who makes the decisions? Do you feel the program is democratic?
9. What advice would you give to youth who want to get involved with philanthropy but may not know how to start or may be intimidated by this type of program?
10. In your opinion, what are some barriers to access for your program? What would help ensure more youth are able to participate in the program and stay long term?
11. What are some examples of impact your youth philanthropy program has had on the participants? (e.g., a boost in confidence, teamwork skills, empathy)
12. Do youth have the opportunity to participate in your program more than once? Do you engage program alumni? If so, what has been successful for this engagement?
13. What do you think are some best practices your program follows which have led to its success?

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