

*A brief history and overview of youth involvement in philanthropy is followed by a description of a range of models for involving young people. These models can be implemented by community foundations, schools, nonprofits, and governmental organizations.*

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## Engaging youth in philanthropy

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YOUTH PHILANTHROPY IS part of a wider paradigm shift from viewing youth as problems to be solved to an asset-based approach where youth are seen as resources to engage in community development. Until recently, policymakers, funders, and program planners have focused on youth deficits while developing programs and policies focused on the prevention of particular problems, such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and dropout rates. This is changing as youth are recognized as resources and social actors who are able to contribute to their own development, to that of their communities, and to civil society in general. National, regional, and local organizations have been developed to support youth engagement in community development.

This chapter focuses on youth philanthropy—engaging youth in grant making and fund development. In the mid-1980s, only a few isolated youth philanthropy programs existed. Over a decade later, youth involvement in philanthropy has spread to thirty states, in addition to Canada, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, New

Zealand, and Northern Ireland. A preliminary scan of the field documented over 250 youth philanthropy programs (see [www.mcfyp.org](http://www.mcfyp.org) for a database of these programs). We do not know how many youth are involved in grant making and fund development, but we do know that programs range from small, locally based efforts to state- and national-level initiatives designed to reach thousands of young people through multiple sites.

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### *Models for engaging youth*

Different models are being developed to involve youth in philanthropy through grant making and fund development. Curriculum and other resource materials designed to teach youth about philanthropy and volunteerism are being created. Community foundations and local United Way chapters serve as hosts for most initiatives to date, but schools, local governments, and nonprofit organizations have also engaged youth in philanthropy (Cretsinger, 1999). An overview of some of the models in community foundations, nonprofit organizations, schools, and government follows, along with a brief description of support services.

#### *Community foundations*

Numerous community foundations are permanently engaging youth as philanthropic partners by establishing youth advisory committees (YACs) either within the foundation or in collaboration with a nonprofit partner. Statewide and regional initiatives are occurring in many areas of the United States. Community foundations in Canada, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Czech Republic, and New Zealand have also developed YACs.

YACs have permanently endowed youth funds, are youth led, and are usually composed entirely of youth ages thirteen through eighteen. Most often, two adult advisers facilitate and staff the committee. YACs engage in the following activities:

- Conduct periodic youth needs and asset assessments in their communities.

- Engage in grant-making activities, including developing requests for proposals, developing criteria and priorities for grants, reviewing grants, interviewing potential grantees, making funding recommendations to the community foundation board, and evaluating their grant making.
- Assist with fund development activities (Tice, 2001).
- Stimulate youth volunteerism in their communities.
- Serve as resources and leaders within their communities.

### *Nonprofit organizations*

Well-established nonprofits, as well as relatively new organizations, are finding ways to engage youth in philanthropy. A wide range of nonprofit organizations are involving youth in philanthropic activities. Some of these organizations are national, such as 4H, Youth as Resources, and the Girl Scouts of America. Others are locally based programs in organizations, such as the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), which, in collaboration with the San Francisco Youth Commission, developed the Youth Initiated Project (YIP). YLI reaches out to youth who have not traditionally been viewed as leaders and involves them in shaping community change ([www.yli.org](http://www.yli.org)).

Youth as Resources (YAR), a national initiative, shows the extent to which young people are becoming involved. YAR was established in 1995 and operates eighty sites in twenty-two states, Canada, New Zealand, and Poland. It has involved an estimated 300,000 young people through serving on grant-making boards and designing and conducting volunteer projects. YAR programs are governed by a board of youth and adults and provide grants to young people to design and carry out service projects. The youth and adult board members work in partnership to solicit and evaluate project proposals from local youth ([www.yar.org](http://www.yar.org)).

### *Schools*

Schools serve as vehicles for teaching and learning about philanthropy, as well as engaging youth in grant making and fund development. For example, Learning to Give is a K-12 educational initiative designed to teach children about philanthropy,

volunteerism, and the nonprofit sector by weaving information and concepts into existing curricula. More than five hundred teacher-developed and tested lesson plans have been created and are free to download from the Learning to Give Web site ([www.learningtogive.org](http://www.learningtogive.org)). Six hundred teachers in more than thirty states are now using these resources.

In New York City, Common Cents offers youth a chance to raise and distribute money to nonprofits and other worthy causes within their neighborhoods and schools. In 2000, students from over six hundred schools raised \$450,000 by gathering pennies. AmeriCorps volunteers orient school staff to the program and provide support to the schools.

### *Government*

Some city governments are establishing youth councils to guide the spending of funds allocated for youth programs. Others are involving youth in additional roles within government. For example, Youth Commissioners in Indiana are appointed by the governor to serve as a resource to youth in their senate district. Youth Commissioners are involved in fundraising, service, and legislative advocacy.

### *Support services*

Some organizations are specializing in developing important training opportunities as well as written and other resource materials designed to teach young people about the field of philanthropy. Community Partnerships with Youth ([www.cpyinc.org](http://www.cpyinc.org)) is one organization that serves this role.

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### *Outcomes*

Youth philanthropy creates synergies between the fields of philanthropy and youth development. Although significant and important research has been done in each of the two fields, not many studies have focused on youth philanthropy. This is not surprising; most of the youth philanthropy initiatives are relatively new. Many

of these initiatives are conducting formative evaluations to develop and strengthen their own work. Most of these evaluation reports are internal documents, and the findings have not been disseminated publicly. Three important documents, by Cretsinger (1999), Youth Leadership Institute (2001), and Garza and Stevens (2002), provide a national view of youth philanthropy in the United States.

This section presents an initial framework for thinking about outcomes related to youth philanthropy and presents some of the key findings from over ten years of evaluation research (1991–2002) focused on the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP; [www.mcfyp.org](http://www.mcfyp.org)). Although much of the research in the field of youth development and civic engagement focuses on important attitudinal changes for individuals, the framework offered here requires a wider-angle lens and a broader methodological tool kit that allows us to capture organizational, community, regional, and policy outcomes. This framework is offered as a starting point to be built on and added to by other initiatives and researchers. There is still much to learn about youth philanthropy within programs and across initiatives.

Documenting outcomes has become increasingly important to funders and nonprofits alike. Questions are being raised about the effectiveness of both funders' and program implementers' efforts. For example, how effective are foundations' strategies? How and to what extent have programs made a difference—for whom and under what conditions? How can we best disseminate what we have learned about effective practices? Increasingly, evaluators are being brought to the table as partners to help answer these questions. A new emphasis on building learning communities is developing.

Since 1989, Michigan YACs have received over \$8 million in grants. Over eight thousand young people have participated, and many more young lives have been touched through YAC grant making. MCFYP has created systemic, community-based change, with profound changes in the way youth are engaged in the field of philanthropy, in nonprofits, and in the social fabric of community life. Although not every community has experienced these changes to the same degree, seeds have been planted in every Michigan

county through ninety-six YACs. Some seeds have grown, bloomed, and spread seeds to new communities; others are growing more slowly, while a few lay dormant, in need of water and fertilizer.

Evaluation research has documented outcomes from MCFYP at the individual, organizational, neighborhood or community, and regional levels (Tice, 1998, 2003). Methods used to document these outcomes include ethnographic case studies, participant observation, interviews (group and individual), surveys, and data interpretation workshops attended by key stakeholders (youth, adult advisers, and staff).

### *Outcomes for individuals*

Youth who participate in grant making and fund development benefit in many ways:

- *Knowledge about philanthropy and nonprofits.* YAC members learn about community foundations, grant making, fund development, evaluation, community issues, the nonprofit sector in their community, and opportunities for volunteering. This knowledge is not usually offered in a traditional school setting.
- *Leadership and grant-making skills.* Youth advisory committee members learn to be effective community leaders. They develop communication skills and learn how to lead a meeting effectively, work as part of a diverse team, and listen to others' points of view. They gain effective grant-making skills, including assessing youth needs and assets, developing requests for proposals, reviewing grant proposals, and evaluating grant effectiveness. Some youth have opportunities to participate as YAC liaisons or as voting members of their community foundation board, thereby learning board-related skills. Others are asked to sit on community task forces or to provide input to organizations designing youth-related projects. Still other young people have opportunities to speak publicly about their YAC to community groups, at community foundation events, and at state and national conferences.

- *Personal development.* YAC members may become increasingly self-confident and sensitive toward people who are different from them. They have opportunities to make a difference and contribute to their communities. These experiences can help them define themselves as leaders. One young person explained the value of the experience of serving on a YAC as follows: “I like to think that YAC helped to shape the person that I am today. Not only was the actual experience in the YAC extremely valuable, but it gave me exposure to many other human service and cultural organizations that I was previously unaware of. YAC helped to change me from the very quiet shy person I was to the still shy but much more empowered person that I feel today. I think that YACs are wonderful programs to involve youth in their communities and make them feel as though they are valued members of society.”

Youth grant recipients and participating adults benefit as well. Grant recipients are required to involve youth in the development and implementation of the proposed project. Many grants are designed, written, and implemented by young people. Youth benefit from participating in the actual projects. What these outcomes are and the extent to which individuals experience them depend on the grant's purposes, activities, and the level of participant involvement in the project.

Adults who work directly with organizations hosting youth grant makers and those who serve as staff or board members in organizations receiving grants benefit from their involvement. These benefits have been observed in Michigan but have been more extensively documented elsewhere (see [www.theinnovationcenter.org](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org)).

Adults become increasingly aware of youth as a resource. In Michigan, there has been a spin-off effect. Most of the adults who are advisers or are on community foundation boards serve in multiple ways in their communities. They may sit on other boards, work in nonprofit organizations, or volunteer their time in other ways. Community foundation board members tend to be the leaders and are often described as the movers and shakers in town.

They often take their new attitudes, awareness, and ideas about how to involve youth into their other work.

### *Organizations*

When organizations host youth philanthropy programs, the process can change the way they do business. This has certainly been the case for community foundations (Orosz, Tice, and Van Eck, 2002). Requiring grantees to involve youth in proposal development and program implementation can also have spin-off effects for those organizations (Tice, 2003). For example, one youth-serving organization had never asked youth for their input on programming. Now, after receiving several grants from their local YAC, they always include youth in the process. Their positive experience working with young people on the grants made them realize that they had a valuable underused resource available to them.

### *Communities and neighborhoods*

YACs are modeling how to effectively involve youth in an organization and in a community. They are often highly visible within their communities. When YACs are active grant makers and leaders in their geographical service areas—neighborhoods, communities, or even counties—the way people think about involving youth in civic life can begin to change (Tice, 2003).

### *Regions*

MCFYP is a statewide initiative, with statewide and regional-level leadership training opportunities. These purposefully structured opportunities allowed urban, suburban, and rural youth to get to know each other and each other's communities.

One of the strengths of a regional initiative that provides opportunities for joint leadership training is that youth develop personal and working relationships with other youth and adults different from themselves. There are few venues for youth from diverse backgrounds to work together on issues of common concern. Typically, youth are provided opportunities to compete against other

youth in academics and sports. YACs provide an opportunity for them to learn how to collaborate.

Youth philanthropy can be a vehicle for national-level funders that want to make a regional impact in a particular area and value the benefits of grant making done at the local level. In Michigan, YAC members have had many opportunities to serve as intermediaries and in local leadership roles for the distribution of statewide grants from national funders. These grants focus on topics that directly affect young people, such as violence prevention, civil rights, smoking prevention, and volunteerism.

For example, Michigan tobacco settlement monies are being routed to local communities through community foundations to fund health-related programs for youth and seniors. One of the stipulations for receiving these dollars is that two YAC members serve on the advisory committees that review proposals and make grant recommendations. Many of these committees have members who are professionals from health-related organizations or programs, such as hospital administrators and nonprofit staff. Often, the young people are the only ones present with any grant-making experience, a role that puts them in a unique leadership position.

Policies can be changed to allow fuller participation of youth in leadership roles. For example, MCFYP youth advisory committee members were active in developing and encouraging the passage of a bill in 1998 that allows sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds to serve as voting members on nonprofit boards.

Regions will benefit as youth who know about and have participated in grant making and fund development move into young adulthood. Findings from a longitudinal study of MCFYP YAC alumni extending from 1993 to the present indicate that youth continue to give and volunteer long after they complete their YAC experiences (Tice, 1998, 2003). For example, in 2002, 93 percent of the youth surveyed ( $n = 94$ ) had given money to charity over the past year, and about half had given amounts over \$200. Seventy-three percent of the respondents had volunteered their time during the past year. Of those who said they had volunteered, most

indicated they had given between two and ten hours of their time over the past month. Several respondents commented that they were in school and did not have time to volunteer but planned to in the future.

Some youth are pursuing career paths in the nonprofit sector or in the field of philanthropy as a result of their experiences serving as YAC members. Others responded that serving on a YAC had affected their choice of studies or career path. Others are finding ways to stay active as grant makers, leaders, and fund developers through volunteer activities. Of the ninety-four youth responding to the longitudinal survey in 2002, nineteen were serving on nonprofit boards, fourteen of those as voting members. Fourteen were serving on community task forces, and seven volunteered as resources for a youth philanthropy initiative. Foundations and nonprofits are starting to draw on the pool of these youth leaders who are already knowledgeable about their work for internships, employment, board members, and volunteers.

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### *Key issues*

Four key issues have implications for conceptualizing, funding, and implementing youth philanthropy initiatives: involving a diverse group of youth, changing attitudes, developing effective practices, and sustainability.

#### *Involving a diverse group of youth*

Youth initiatives are reaching out to include a diverse group of young people, but many comprise white, high-achieving, already actively involved middle-class youth (Youth Leadership Institute, 2001). Findings from the MCFYP evaluation indicate, however, that high-achieving youth who are known leaders and are already involved in many after-school activities are not the most effective YAC members unless they limit their other commitments. Another finding is that the experience of serving on a YAC had more profound impacts on young people who were not known leaders. Most

important, the most effective creative grant making occurred in YACs with a diverse group of members. With good facilitation, having diverse perspectives at the table forced young people to examine their own stereotypes and to think creatively.

Diversity does not just happen in youth philanthropy; it is achieved intentionally. Active and thoughtful recruitment is necessary to ensure that youth philanthropy initiatives reach diverse groups (ethnic and racial, socioeconomic, and geographical) of young people. Some neighborhoods, school districts, and communities are wonderfully diverse. Others are homogeneous by nature and sometimes even by design. Crossing inner-city urban-suburban or urban-rural lines can enrich participants' experiences but can also challenge organizational and logistical strategies.

### *Changing attitudes*

Effective youth philanthropy often requires both adults and youths to change their attitudes. Adults must learn to let go and allow young people to lead. Depending on their personal and professional backgrounds, this can be difficult. Similarly, young people have to take on a leadership role. YAC members explained that they were used to being told what to do at school and at home. Most had never had an experience where they had significant responsibility. One implication of this finding is that unless adults have had previous experience, youth leadership and empowerment programs will need to offer technical assistance for the adults as well as the young. Youth leadership training opportunities are vital to developing successful youth philanthropy programs.

### *Developing effective practices*

As the field of youth philanthropy becomes more established, one important task is to develop effective practices. Because of the diversity of initiatives, multiple sets of effective practices may exist and indeed may be needed. It will be important to understand for whom the practices are effective and why. For example, what might be an effective practice in a school setting may not work in a community foundation. The Coalition of Community Foundations for

Youth ([www.ccfy.org](http://www.ccfy.org)) has taken a leadership role in developing a broader set of principles and best practices for youth and philanthropy (Garza and Stevens, 2002):

- Build structure and capacity.
- Create organizational structures to support a youth philanthropy program.
- Build a youth-friendly environment.
- Develop a grant-making program that builds on community assets to make lasting change.
- Develop youth-adult partnerships.
- Engage youth as decision makers.
- Connect adults as partners.
- Create connections.
- Involve youth from different cultures and backgrounds.
- Expand and promote leadership roles for youth in the community.
- Develop partnerships with community organizations.
- Develop skills and knowledge.
- Provide program training and ongoing support.
- Plan for sustainability.
- Develop sufficient and sustainable sources of funding.
- Involve youth in fund development.
- Assess program activities and outcomes on a regular basis.
- Communicate program accomplishments.

The MCFYP has developed a set of best practices for involving youth in community foundation grant making and fund development. As youth become increasingly involved in the field of philanthropy, they can share their understanding of what is effective, for whom, and under what circumstances and in the process deepen understanding and practice.

### *Sustainability*

Creating endowed youth funds to be advised by youth is one way to ensure that youth grant making persists. Integrating knowledge

about philanthropy and volunteerism into existing curriculum is another way. Policy changes that allow young people to be voting members on nonprofit boards is yet a third. Finally, developing opportunities within foundations, such as internships and opportunities to serve on the board, for young people interested in pursuing careers in philanthropy will help to ensure the sustainability of this idea.

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### ***Conclusion***

Youth philanthropy is being implemented in many different ways and in a diverse group of organizations. Youth grant makers are engaged as social actors in their communities. They have economic power to leverage and the ability to serve in leadership roles. Building a learning community of youth, program staff, funders, evaluators, and academic researchers is an important next step. Open dialogue and sharing of information and resources can strengthen everyone's efforts.

With the huge generational transfer of wealth on the horizon, there is an unprecedented opportunity to reweave our social fabric. An important challenge for the future is to link elders and young people through meaningful philanthropic and volunteer activity. Youth grant makers and fund developers are important keys to unleashing resources for the common good. On the changing landscape of philanthropy, youth have an opportunity to shape the field and make a significant difference.

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