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Youth Organizing: Notes From the Field

A report from a youth organizer/funder retreat held December 11-12, 1998 Pocantico Center, New York

1. Overview

Nearly two years ago, a small group of funders with an expressed interest in youth organizing initiated discussions about the lack of financial resources available to this important field. To begin addressing this issue, the funders hosted a briefing on youth organizing at the Open Society Institute on December 10, 1997, that was attended by 75 foundation representatives. In a follow-up meeting to this very successful briefing, funders and activists agreed that an important next step would be to convene a lengthier dialogue with youth organizers and funders to discuss the state of the field of youth organizing and how funders can best support its growth.

Subsequently, a retreat was held at the Pocantico Center in upstate New York, December 11-12, 1998. Funders from 11 foundations and youth organizers from 16 organizations in eight states and Washington, D.C. attended the meeting. What follows is a summary of the minutes taken at the retreat.

Throughout the course of the two-day retreat the youth organizers presented their understanding, concerns and perspectives on their work as organizers. Funders also shared information on where funding dollars are being awarded and how foundations view youth funding.

In addition to these presentations, funders and organizers gathered in small groups for discussion and dialogue on specific issues. Funders brought questions about how to better interpret youth organizing for board members and other funders and about how to best evaluate youth organizing as program officers. The organizers used this opportunity to bring some of their questions and concerns to funders, as well as to better network among themselves. Through their presentations, the organizers emphasized the unique approaches they bring to working with youth which set them apart from other kinds of more traditional youth programming.

The motivation for calling the retreat—the lack of communication between funders and youth organizers—was dramatized in these small group discussions. Both sides recognized that foundations do not always understand the ways in which youth organizers define their work. For example, funders emphasize the importance of strategic planning, capacity building, and articulations of long-term vision in order to develop tools for program reporting and evaluation for their foundation boards.

Conversely, the organizers repeatedly raised the financial and personnel constraints they operate under that prevent them from attending to such tasks. Both funders and organizers agreed, however, that without a basis of mutual understanding, it will be difficult to garner the resources necessary to strengthen the field.

Finally, in line with the original intent of this gathering, two specific proposals emerged for discussion throughout the retreat: 1) Should funders start a funders' collaborative, and if so, what should it look like? The organizers supported this proposal; and 2) Should there be a national gathering of youth organizers called together in the coming year? The organizers rejected this proposal as being premature. Organizers stressed their need for the time and space—and the resources to make them possible—to gather together again for the purpose of focusing on trends in the field, in-depth sharing of strategies and more articulation of youth organizing models.

Organizers:

Bineshi Albert, Youth Action, *Albuquerque, New Mexico*
Bobbie Jacobs Ghaffer, SAFE, Inc., *Pembrook, North Carolina*
Karen Hayes, Youth for Social Change, *Durham, North Carolina*
Dan Hosang, PUEBLO, *Oakland, California*
Brenda Hyde, Southern Echo, Inc., *Jackson, Mississippi*
Eli Yong Lee, Petroglyph Monument Protection Coalition, *Albuquerque, New Mexico*
Kim McGillicuddy, Youth Force, *Bronx, New York*
Hez Norton, North Carolina Lambda Youth Network, *Durham, North Carolina*
Jeffrey Pinzino, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, *Chicago, Illinois*
Rebecca Rathje, Youth United for Change, *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*
Paula Rojas, El Puente, *Brooklyn, New York*
Liz Steinhauser, Boston Youth Organizing Project, *Boston, Massachusetts*
Lisa Sullivan, Listen, Inc., *Washington, DC*
Eric Tang, Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, *New York, New York*
Alexie Torres-Fleming, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, *Bronx, New York*
Miya Yoshitani, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, *Oakland, California*

Funders:

Amanda Berger, Jewish Fund for Justice
Julia Burgess, Center for Community Change
Hubert Dixon, III, Catholic Campaign for Human Development
Marcia Festen, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Henry Fernandez, Open Society Institute
Jose Carlos Montes, Edward W. Hazen Foundation
Maria Mottola, New York Foundation
Ben Rodriguez-Cubeñas, Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Robert Sherman, Surdna Foundation
Neil Stanley, Public Welfare Foundation
Karen Zeitlin, The Moriah Fund

Facilitator:
Sue Bellinger

Notetaker:
Jennifer Harvey

2. Presentation from Youth Organizers

Differences and Commonalities

"*Youth Organizing involves young people in a membership that does direct action against defined targets on issues that are important to young people and to the community at large. Youth organizing seeks to alter power relations, create meaningful institutional change and develop leaders.*"
Why Youth Organizing, *page 13*

The morning before the retreat officially began, the youth organizers gathered among themselves, many of them meeting for the first time. Recognizing that to ask the question "what is youth organizing" would be too large and elusive a question for one meeting, they used the above quote as an "operating tool" for a discussion which helped elucidate the main issues that distinguish and unite diverse youth organizing groups. This conversation formed the basis for a presentation to the funders at the opening session of the conference.

Their presentation focused on the following four issue areas and a summary of these presentations follows below:

- **Approaches and Strategies**
- **Membership**
- **Direct Action**
- **Decision Making and Structures**

From the outset, organizers emphasized that while they had general agreement about the importance of these four components and a great deal of agreement within each component, individual models might look very different in practice among different groups.

APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES:
Youth organizers employ many different approaches and strategies. However,

although the specificities of their work and the issues that each holds as important are varied, some basic assumptions emerged

> *"When you don't politicize issues of illiteracy; when you don't politicize issues around negligence on the part of high schools; when you don't uproot those political contradictions, then you're not benefiting the young people you work with in the long run."* —Eric Tang, CAAAV

as common. Organizers generally agreed that the model they envision and seek to facilitate is, as one youth organizer described it, "youth development with a difference." For these youth organizers, the optimal model is one in which youth function holistically both in terms of self improvement and community improvement. Organizing is a vehicle to impact community concerns that involves direct action, community research, issue development, reflection and political analysis. The process through which a membership is recruited and maintained is as important as how large the membership base is. Young people are viewed as key agents—as the activists—in their communities around issues that impact them directly.

An assumption underpinning the work is that the development of young people as whole human beings is not complete without political action. This assumption is perhaps what most clearly distinguishes youth organizing from more traditional youth development models. Organizers repeatedly emphasized that the development needs of their members cannot be met without their involvement in social justice and organizing. Youth organizers who come from immigrant families, for example, are closed off from the political process, thus their issues are inherently and always political issues. Holistic approaches, which connect development needs with organizing, are not a choice for such young people, but are

mandated by circumstances. Approaches that fail to politicize development issues—especially in an unjust situation—are not to the long-term benefit of young people. In fact, engaging in political action and strategies for social change is essential to the developmental well-being of youth.

There was general agreement that despite their differences in approaches and strategies, at the core youth organizing is about altering power relationships—dealing with power issues, addressing power, challenging power and creating institutional change.

> *"There are struggles when you are a youth organizer of meeting all the other youth development needs of young people. We'll meet with a funder, and in our case it will be well, yes you closed a prison, but how many of your kids got pregnant—How do you answer those kinds of questions? So, certainly we deal with the stresses of having to meet a whole lot of needs without the resources to do so and it's even harder to do so when you're doing organizing. But I don't believe that young people's development needs can be met if they're not engaged in justice—in critiquing the world around them and confronting racism, classism, sexism and oppression."* —Kim McGillicuddy, Youth Force

MEMBERSHIP:
The organizers pointed out that the question is not simply "what kind of membership," but, perhaps more importantly, "membership for what?" The goal, they said, is for youth to take part in an organization not just for the sake of being part of a group, nor to have something simply to do, nor only to achieve a particular victory. Through their involvement in youth organizing projects, participants should gain a political education and consciousness-raising.

What this looks like and how it is named varies greatly among youth organizing groups, even among those who were

> *"Youth Organizing involves young people in a membership that responds to community problems and solutions as the youth themselves identify them."*

present at the retreat, because membership structures vary depending on the community or organization in which they function. What most groups share in common, however, is a membership whose motivation for joining is to impact their daily realities, the neighborhoods, the cultures and the contexts in which they experience their lives.

The youth organizers pointed out that membership in youth programming is defined along a broad spectrum. On

> *"A significant challenge for youth organizing is the fluidity of an inherently changing constituency. How do you build structures while recognizing that particular individuals might change from project to project or from year to year, so there is some sense of accountability about kids coming back?" —Liz Steinhauser, Boston Youth Organizing Project*

one end are more traditional youth development models which create alternatives for youth to "keep them off the streets." Many of the youth organizers felt that inherent in this model are low expectations of what youth are capable of accomplishing. On the other extreme are organizing models in which young people are brought into a membership only for the sake of winning a campaign. In these organizations, little or no concern is directed toward the family and personal pressures in young people's lives.

DIRECT ACTION:
Direct action is an explicit activity that sets youth organizing apart from other youth development strategies. It always involves challenging a defined, specific target and is essential to achieving

real social change, the ultimate goal of youth organizing. Direct actions (negotiation, press conferences, boycotts, demonstrations, public accountability sessions) involve young people in analyzing, planning and strategizing around social problems. Youth leaders are also present when power structures and institutions are confronted. Through direct action, young people critically assess issues of class, race and power.

The process leading up to a direct action is important and must be integrated into the daily work of the membership, long-range strategies and the vision of the organization. In some youth organizing groups, it is the central component and in others it is one part of a whole. Regardless, direct action always involves holding institutions accountable and/or creating alternative institutions.

DECISION MAKING AND STRUCTURES:
The external focus of youth organizing aims to create and build a political voice for young people, to secure a place at the decision-making table in the structures and institutions that impact young people's lives (for example, school, local government, etc.).

> *As groups struggle to set up non-hierarchical models, many groups have experienced difficulty conveying their rationale for this commitment to funders in a way that funders will understand and support.*

In terms of internal structure, everyone agreed that youth must play a key role in the decisions that affect the direction, strategies and actions of the organization. They must be fully present in the process through which the organization creates its vision.

Several people also addressed the steps their groups had taken to resolve inter-generational tensions within their organizations.

> *"Youth Organizing involves young people in a membership that responds to community problems and solutions as the youth themselves identify them." "A theme in youth organizing is that young people need to play a key role in the decisions that affect the direction of an organization, in the decisions that affect the strategy, in the process by which you create your vision for the organizing work."*
> —*Miya Yoshitani, APEN*

3. Open Discussion

The afternoon discussions were intended to promote networking among organizers as well as advance effective communication with funders on numerous issues, including inter-generational programming, effectiveness of youth-led projects, and accountability to funders. In reality, reaching a common understanding among the two groups proved difficult to achieve. Organizers asserted their commitment to several dynamics that proved problematic to funding mechanics, including youth directed projects, non-hierarchical and de-centralized decision-making structures, and responsiveness to changing community concerns. Conflicts between group leaders and funders and other authorities, as well as power and generational shifts within the organizations themselves, were also issues that surfaced in these discussions.

In response to the many critiques from funders and others of their models, the organizers repeatedly emphasized that the amount of resources available to youth development programs versus youth organizing programs means that they simply cannot be compared. No youth-led campaign in the nation has a budget of more than $300,000 or $400,000. This stands in dramatic contrast to the multi-million dollar budget a traditional development program might have.

Finally, many of the organizers felt that youth development programs tend to embrace the young people who are already the "stars." Youth organizing tends to engage the young people who are often on the fringes, the young people who youth development programs miss. For many of these young people, it is the first time they are embraced or that their particular skills are valued. For example, young people who might challenge or question authority are not likely to be welcomed into traditional youth development programs or, if they are, they remain on the fringes of those programs. Such young people make terrific organizers.

The afternoon discussion also raised questions about how youth organizing is evaluated versus how youth development is evaluated. The two cannot be measured by the same criteria. Both funders and organizers agreed that a great deal of work needs to be done to articulate how youth organizing should be evaluated and to create a language that they both find useful and true to the work.

> *"Many adult community organizing groups make, for example, a five-year plan, then they come together and ask, 'What did we do this year to achieve it?' When I look for something like this in youth organizing, when I look for signs of strategic planning, of process-developing, I see a lot of campaigns. What are people's ideas about the bigger picture, about developing a sustainable beyond a campaign?"*
> —*Jose Carlos Montes, Edward W. Hazen Foundation*

The following excerpts characterized some of the themes that came up during the afternoon session:

Intergenerational Models and Power Sharing

Brenda Hyde, Southern Echo
"Self-confidence and self-esteem are power. Our experience has shown

that once young people have the information and the knowledge, which builds confidence and esteem, they are not afraid to put things forward in the larger group, or even to tell adults directly that they are not to be gate-keepers of the organizing process.

In Southern Echo, we believe that the only way for a community to truly be empowered is via an intergenerational model, where young people and adults work together in partnership. We place special emphasis on youth, and staff makes sure that they are an active part of the entire program. This model, through which relationship building occurs, is a key part of our youth development approach. Southern Echo states clearly that youth are not the future, but the present, and emphasizes the ways in which young people bring new ideas, methods and vision to our work. At the same time, we believe, youth need to know the history of the (civil rights) struggle—through an intergenerational model, the young people are able to directly learn this from adults who have that experience."

Karen Hayes, Youth for Social Change
"For us, the relationship building piece is important. Organizing is about building capacity for direct action, but it is more significantly about relationship building, about challenging the oppression that youth face, including oppression within families and in the larger community. YSC began as part of one organization and then became independent, which was the plan from the outset. But when it came time for this to happen there was real tension with some of the adults. It was particularly difficult for those adults doing the leadership training because the young people wanted to go beyond the limits that the adults had established for them in the organization. As we transfer skills to young people, and after we've built the organizational capacity, then we have to be very intentional about stepping

away. We must constantly work against the manipulation factor as leaders in organizing because people act out of many different bags when dealing with youth."

Lisa Sullivan, Listen, Inc.
"There are cultural and pragmatic issues around an intergenerational model of organizing that need to be fleshed out. Culturally, within the African American community, older adults tend to deal with young people in a parental role, rather than in a facilitative role. One piece of the work that needs to be done is to move adults from parenting to facilitating.

There are pragmatic issues as well. Adults in communities of color are still seeking to acquire the power they have never had themselves, making the issue of power-sharing more difficult. The way this plays out, for example, is that adults think they need to acquire power on behalf of the whole community and will then use it to take care of young people in the community."

Bineshi Albert, Youth Action
"Youth Action works in partnership with various community organizations and thus encounters these inter-generational challenges regularly. Securing the full participation of youth requires a multi-faceted approach.

First, it is essential that young people themselves are confident and feel able to articulate their ideas and vision. Youth Action works on skills building with youth to ensure this happens.

"Our long term goal is to figure out how to make youth an essential and powerful part of this organization. We are looking to create a neighborhood that youth helped to create…where they are equal partners in the community." —Jeff Pinzino, Logan Square Neighborhood Association

Second, it is important to educate the adults as well. Adults need to understand that young people have skills and ideas. Sometimes the adults need to be asked to define what their role is or should be, for example, in a youth training weekend or even whether they have any role there.

Third, it is a reality that giving responsibility to young people, and letting go, requires taking a risk. While that needs to be acknowledged, it also needs to be emphasized that it is not a risk without benefit."

Paula Rojas, El Puente

"There is an important difference between community organizing that attaches a youth component, and an organization built by young people themselves. In the first, young people are organized, and in the second, they are the organizers. In this second kind of organization, if it is built organically, adults will come into the work once the young people address internal power issues and have identified the work to be done. The transition of youth out of an organization as they grow up is a particularly difficult and exciting part of youth organizing. This is the only time in life where one moves automatically from being oppressed to having power, as one goes from being a young person to an adult. But that shift in power is deep and complicated. So easily, what begins as a youth organization— as people get older—becomes something else. While young people in their organizing work learn the importance of power sharing, it is easy for them to forget this as they grow older and more powerful in the organizations. Power is so seductive."

"We struggle with the balance between dealing with day-to-day crisis management and the organizing and looking ahead and planning time to do capacity building. The work that comes up every day is a death threat, or someone getting kicked out of their house, and we're figuring out how to deal with all of that in the midst of trying to step back and say 'okay, what's our long-term plan here?'" —Hez Norton, North Carolina Lambda Youth Network

Kim McGillicuddy, Youth Force

"It's a simple fact: once anyone grasps power it is very hard to give it up, even among those who deal with justice every day of their lives. Power complicates all relationships, not just between youth and adults but, for example, between the 18 to 20-year olds (who have more experience and knowledge) and the 14 to 15-year olds. We at Youth Force tried to deal with this challenge by putting down on paper that 51% of our Board must be youth under 21 years old."

Alexie Torres-Fleming, Youth Ministries

"In Youth Ministries we deal with this issue of youth being in control through a leadership circle that attends to all policy questions and planning, composed of 50% young people and 50% adults.

Another challenge that I've noticed is that young people often move into particular roles within an organization out of their own self interest. It might be that they'll become interested in other pieces of the work or frankly they might want to take other roles that will prepare them for a job. Tensions can arise if, for example, one of your best youth organizing leaders wants to switch roles to move in funding circles—even though the leaders knows she's needed on the ground for the sake of the organizing campaign.

Another internal challenge around power we face is that while we're committed to being non-hierarchical and allowing shared consensus to determine the course of the organization, the Executive Director is the person ultimately responsible to funders. As Kim McGillicuddy put it, 'funders want to know who is in charge.'

Structural Issues and Capacity Building

Many of the questions funders brought to the table during this discussion related to the strategic planning process of youth organizations, specifically asking how youth organizations develop beyond a campaign-to-campaign approach. Their question raised issues of capacity building and infrastructure, and implied some critique of how youth organizations function over the long-haul. Organizers gave many responses to these question. They emphasized the particular practices within their organizations to build capacity and create a long-term vision. They also described the particular challenges they face as they work to meet young people's needs while doing organizing. Perhaps most importantly, they emphasized that their access to resources, or the lack thereof, plays a significant role in their ability to foster the long-term vision for their organization.

Youth Development and Youth Organizing

The differences between more traditional service delivery programs and youth organizing projects also continued as a theme into the afternoon sessions. Some people felt that these two models are completely distinct from one another, while others felt that youth organizing is natural "step" in the youth development process. Where there was agreement, however, was that foundations generally favor more traditional youth development programs rather than grassroots youth organizing.

Bineshi Albert, Youth Action
"We practice a philosophy in which we hire and train younger people as a model of younger people successfully running an effective organization. Groups can hire young people, but there has to be an organizational commitment to train them. Youth Action employs tight institutional

structures that allow someone to come into staff positions in the organization with little experience, not necessarily knowing all the pieces of the work. This system and democratic structure means the work can be modeled and taught in process. More importantly, the organization can sustain itself. Developing management skills of

> *"There is a lot of 'founders disease'… people who have been doing this work for a long time and don't realize that the young people coming up are in the same place they were 20 or 30 years ago when somebody had to take the risk and say 'Okay, go with it, run with it, do it.'"*
> *—Bineshi Albert, YouthAction*

young people is as important for the organization's sustainability as for the individual."

Lisa Sullivan, Listen, Inc.
"Your organizing leaders have to practice what they preach from the inside out, in terms of building capacity and structure within the organization. This is difficult, though, because the allocation of funding is very programmatic-product driven. I don't see dollars going for young people who want to engage in the process of creating a sustainable organization that is really altering power relations. These kinds of young people are not being given the opportunity to develop their process, because to pull down dollars for your organization someone has to have the skills to manage a non-profit and take care of all of the pieces, which are not the same as the organizing work. This makes capacity building and structural issues complicated."

Hez Norton, North Carolina Lambda Youth Network
"For us, a youth-led organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, there is a particular challenge of balancing day-to-day crises and chaos with organizing and planning ahead for the long term.

In our process of consciousness raising, young people are the ones who have to bring the adults up to speed around organizing work, and there's got to be power issues in this. Young people need access to the resources that the adults bring to the table, but many times our politics are too 'out there' for the adults to understand. It's difficult to have a conversation that doesn't explode. This reproduces the same pattern in funding—particularly in programs for queer youth—that only allows for crisis management, or 'victimization funding.' We're not talking about community development and leadership building. We're strictly in a service-type land. That's what's getting funding. What's exciting about this conversation is that we're talking about opening up a different way to get funding."

Eli Yon Lee, Petroglyph Monument Protection Coalition
"If capacity building difficulties is one of the blocks for youth organizers securing resources, this problem circles back to garnering more resources for these organizations. Capacity building is just as much about garnering more resources for organizing and about how you focus them in very strong and specific ways. What, for example, would YSC look like with 20 trained organizers? To really talk about youth organizing 'winning' and improving our communities, there is the need for a serious discussion of enabling us to redefine organizing so that it is a practiced, sustainable profession for people of color. We need resources to allow youth organizers the space to redefine organizing so that those in leadership positions now, along with the membership, can redefine how we would wield power once we have it. We've got to address the reality that youth organizing projects are currently working with minimal resources."

Amanda Berger, The Jewish Fund for Justice
"In the funding community, even among progressive foundations and their boards, there is a bias towards groups that can mobilize large numbers of people to shift power on a particular issue. Sometimes foundations don't see youth organizing groups as having the capacity or connections to make structural change in their communities. While youth development programs might have 1,000 youth coming in and out the door in any given week, youth organizing programs are often much smaller, which is not as appealing to foundation boards. And if youth are involved in running organizations, many foundations also question their ability to sustain themselves."

Henry Fernandez, Open Society Institute
"While youth organizing seeks to be non-hierarchical, in good youth development programs youth can be pulled through the hierarchy in an individual development process so they can eventually have skills to be good managers. Hierarchy allows the program to set expectations for young people, so they can see where they are going. Individual campaigns do not necessarily benefit individuals or groups of young people unless the organization through which they take place can sustain itself over time. I wonder if youth organizing groups should have the ability to build institutions which can focus on young people as they develop during different stages."

4. Mapping the Funding Landscape: How Foundations Define Youth Funding

Saturday morning, Maria Mottola, a program officer from the New York Foundation, made a presentation on "Funder Realities" in the field of youth organizing. She explained that many

funders have expressed the need for a clearer definition of youth organizing, not just for themselves, but also for their Boards. As she explained, "We also need clarity about what our guidelines say we do and do not fund in the area of youth related programming."

To get a better sense of the terrain, the funders who attended the retreat surveyed themselves to find out how much money goes to youth organizing, whether funding is national or local, and how youth programming is described in their guidelines (e.g., youth organizing, development, etc.). Maria noted that while organizers have to convince program officers that they are fundable, program officers in turn also have to convince their Boards of the merits of supporting these projects. This can be a challenge since foundation boards are often a step or two further removed from the field.

A survey detailing funding practices of youth programs was completed by program officers from the nine different foundations listed below:

- The Catholic Campaign for Human Development
- The Edward W. Hazen Foundation
- Jewish Fund for Justice
- Moriah Fund
- The New York Foundation
- Open Society Institute
- Public Welfare Foundation
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- Surdna Foundation

Selected findings include:
1. The nine foundations made 232 grants to youth programs last year (1997/98);
2. Two of the foundations, the New York Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, fund locally (the other seven foundations fund nationally);
3. $212,947,425 total was awarded to youth programs in FY98

The survey revealed that funding for youth falls along a spectrum ranging from direct services to organizing. Program officers also employ different kinds of language in order to more strategically present youth groups to their Boards. The following lists the categories and language used for youth programming that foundations support:

Category of Grantmaking	# of Groups Funded
Youth Organizing	52
Leadership Development	43
Civic Participation	22
Peer Education	14
Early Intervention	13
Direct Services	13
Service Learning	10
Community Service	9
Mentoring	8
Employment, Training,	7
Advocacy and Policy	6
Arts and Culture	6
Children Affected by AIDS,	4
Youth Entrepreneurs	2

Organizers also expand their definition of what they do in order to secure funding that will sustain their organizations as a whole (i.e., beyond their "organizing" work). For example, some organizations receive money from youth development grants that is used for the arts and literacy components of their program.

Youth organizers often utilize literacy curriculums that support political education, or arts projects that incorporate consciousness-raising.

In order to more fully describe the landscape of funding for youth organizing, the groups provided the following list of foundations, other than those already identified above, that have funded, or which currently fund, their work.

Mary Reynolds Babcock
Ben and Jerry's Foundation
Robert Bowne Foundation
Chicago Community Trust
Chicago Resource Center
City of Chicago
Fund for the Four Directions
(Native American issues)
French American Charitable Trust
Hayden
Heron Foundation
Marianist Sharing Fund
Merck Family Fund
Ms. Foundation
(Collaborative for Healthy Girls)
Needmor Fund
New World Foundation
New York City (Div. for Criminal
Justice Services)
C. Smith Reynolds
Robin Hood Foundation
Rockefeller Foundation
San Francisco Foundation
Seventh Generation Fund
(Native American groups)
Solidago
Tides Foundation (Snowden Fund and
the Valentine/Perry Snyder Fund)
Twenty-First Century Fund
(African American groups)
United Way CAPS
Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program
at Shelter Rock
Ryan White Fund

The organizers asked funders for specific
financial information concerning the grants
they award. The chart on the following
page includes that information.

Foundation	Grant Range	Total Grants per Year	Amount to Youth Organizations	Multi-Year Funding	General Support
Catholic Campaign for Human Development	up to $10,000 (local Diocese) $10,000 to $100,000 nationally	$14 million		No	Yes
Edward W. Hazen Foundation	$25,000 to $30,000	$1.4 million	One-fourth	No	Yes
Jewish Fund for Justice	$7,500 to $25,000	1.2 million	One-sixth	Yes	Yes
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	$77,000 average (never more than 30% of a group's budget	$140 million ($50 million in the U.S.)	$15 million to development; $2 million to other youth programs	Yes (not to first-time grantees)	No
Moriah Fund	$10,000 to $40,000	$8.5 million	$.5 million		
New York Foundation	$40,000 average	$4 million in New York City	One-third	Yes	
Open Society Institute	$5,000 to $50,000			Yes	Yes
Public Welfare Foundation	$10,000 to $250,000 ($20,000 to $50,000 for youth organizing groups)	$18.5 million		Yes	Yes
Rockefeller Brothers Fund	$35,000 to $40,000	$1.2 million	One-half	Most grants awarded for two-year period	
Surdna Foundation	$80,000 to $100,000	$5.5 million	60 Percent	Yes (not to first-time grantees)	Yes (not to first-time grantees)

5. Case Studies in Youth Organizing

In order to explore more of the themes raised in previous discussions, the retreat participants decided to go into greater detail about approaches groups are utilizing in their youth organizing work.

Four organizers made ten-minute presentations on the following five questions:

Core beliefs—What are the core values and political assumptions which drive your work?
Membership—Who is your constituency or base?
Strategies—What are your main strategies?
Governance—What is your structure? How do you make decisions?
Capacity—What is one thing you are really good at, and one major challenge to your work?

As a follow-up question, they were also asked to share a recent organizing victory.

Brenda Hyde, Southern Echo, Jackson, Mississippi
"Southern Echo is a leadership development, education and training organization working to develop grassroots leadership throughout the state of Mississippi and the Southern region. Our primary objective is to make the political, economic, environmental and educational systems accountable to the African American community in the Mississippi Delta. Southern Echo emphasizes the importance of good and strong community-organizing work as the essential means for achieving our fundamental goal of empowering the community. A special emphasis is on the active inclusion of young people in the process and that they be treated as equals to the adults. The reason this is emphasized is because young people have the fewest ties to the past,

the least fear of the white community and the potential for creating a broad vision of a fair and just society. Young people are the present, as well as the future. We believe that their effective participation is essential if the struggle to empower the African American community in Mississippi is to be successful.

In doing this community organizing work, we find it helpful to coin our own language, because we work with grassroots people. Our membership is disadvantaged African Americans in the Delta of Mississippi where there is a high unemployment and illiteracy rate. You have to speak a language people know, and the best way to do that is to develop that language together. Henry asked yesterday how we protect our young people in the organizing process. Developing a common language together helps to empower younger people in their active participation with adults.

Before we start any process we have to agree to be willing to engage in truth-telling. We have to be willing to overcome our fear. We believe that in order for a community to be able to effectively fight racism, we have to sit down together and tell the truth. That is a core value and principle of Southern Echo. This also helps when there are adults who want to gate-keep a process. We can say, 'Stop let's slow this down, this is not just about you.' What's accountability? Putting community interests over self-interest. What is power? The capacity to make things happen or not to happen. These simple definitions of terms help to empower our young people so when they are engaged in a process with adults they can say, 'Mister So-and-so, you're hogging the discussions, you've got to listen to understand as opposed to listening to respond. Don't gate-keep the process.' Simple language tends to help guide our work and help us to be more effective in working together.

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What is our structure and how do we make decisions? Southern Echo traditionally made decisions through the staff. But, within the last two years, we've broadened the process. All of our decisions are made through a working group process. The working group includes staff members, our Board of Directors and community leaders from various organizations we work with. We just came off of a two-and-a-half-day working retreat in which we developed our vision, strategies and program for 1999.

Our strategy depends on what we're trying to accomplish at a particular point in time. We have two-and-a-half-day residential training schools, for example, around creating an African American public education agenda or creating environmental safety zones, or community organizing, or understanding the political process. All the strategies that we use go into our overall vision, which is to empower the community. We do some direct actions. Sometimes we have to go to school boards challenging them to change the time of school board meetings to when working people can attend. We take young people and adults to the state capitol to meet their representatives and senators and build those relationships.

We are a dues-paying-membership organization. Our membership ranges from $1 for a student to $10 for an individual adult, $15 for a family, $25 for an organization.

One of the things we really do well is creating a broad base of support in the community by bringing young people and adults together. Even though this sounds simple, it is somewhat difficult when you have adults and young people working together. What we have really found to work is for people to sit down together and just say, 'Let's be real here. Let's engage in truth-telling, let's talk about what it is here we're trying to accomplish. What's our vision?' We never do anything without

first putting the time in to develop a common vision for what it is that we're about to do. When you develop a common vision everyone takes ownership of it. When you take ownership and develop the strategies, and work to help reach your vision; when you do that together, and young people and older people are working together, on the same basis, then even when you have those bumps in the road and people want to go off on their own, you can bring them back together with, 'What did we agree on?'

The young people that gravitate towards Southern Echo are a mixture. There are the 'A' and 'B' students that might be called 'successful' and there are also young people who have been kicked out of school. We have difficulty reaching out to youth beyond the Delta, though we would like to find a way to bring them in."

Recent Organizing Victories:
1) Southern Echo stopped the construction of an elementary school which, in effect, because of its location, would have been a public-private school for white children, depleting funds desperately needed for renovations in existing schools (for mostly students of color).
2) We established an environmental safety zone around a school located next to a cotton field, so that pesticides and other toxins will no longer be sprayed from the air.
3) We secured a Harvard lawyer to support our work, donating time to file a lawsuit against the local school system.

Hez Norton, North Carolina Lambda Youth Network, Durham, North Carolina
"North Carolina Lambda Youth Network is a statewide leadership and organizing network for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth in Durham, North Carolina.

Our core beliefs are pretty simple. One is that youth need to be actively engaged

in their communities and that they are power players in their communities. Another is that our ability to be who we are as queer young people is important, and it is important that we live our lives fully and more justly in a just society. And thirdly, our commitment to address homophobia must include a commitment to address issues of racial, class and gender justice in our communities. Especially as a queer community that is diverse, we need to be talking about justice around all of these issues in order to really be serving our constituents. Our membership is queer young people and their allies in the North Carolina community, including adults.

Our main strategies break down into three areas, because we really are both a leadership and an organizing network. In this whole conversation around youth development and youth organizing, I see us fitting into both in many different ways. The three ways I break it down is that first, we do a lot of work just to provide safe space for young people to come together, a safe space to build community. That may be a social night, that may be a movie discussion night. A lot of our work includes doing service projects which give us the opportunity to work with organizations like Habitat for Humanity or food banks. These provide key opportunities for us to work alongside religious organizations, churches and different kinds of youth groups, most of whom have never seen, or known that they've seen, a queer young person. This really enables us to challenge some stereotypes.

Another approach is training and consciousness-raising. There are two tracks. One is more issue-based, talking about how we're building a movement. The other is more skills-based. We have a summer leadership institute for young people. One result of a recent institute was that the young people created a youth organizing manual which will be used across the state by groups that want

to coordinate actions that relate to organizing whether it be a poetry slam, going to see a legislator or organizing some kind of youth action day. There are 14 campus groups we're linked to and five different youth groups that do LGBT work, and part of the use of the manual will be to encourage them to get more involved in their communities in leadership work.

Our third strategy is public awareness and education. We have done a few direct actions. Direct action is not always easy for us though, because of safety issues. Many young people have issues around being 'out,' where they can be seen, and that kind of thing. One of the things we have done has been to go to different school board meetings—in one case this resulted in the school board deciding to include sexual orientation in the discrimination clause for students. Another direct action was organizing around a gay bar that printed a racist and exploitative ad in a queer newspaper. Another issue we're organizing around is the Abstinence Until Marriage Law. In North Carolina, they only teach abstinence in public schools and, if they mention homosexuality, the only thing they're permitted to say is, 'It's against the Crimes Against Nature Act and it's a felony.' So part of our work is partnering with groups, not just queer groups, but groups like Planned Parenthood, because this is not just a queer youth issue, it's a larger youth issue about young people having access to information about their health and their lives.

We're also working with some religious groups and health departments on a program that talks about ethics in education. We're raising deep moral disagreements about what the schools are doing around religion and incidents of prejudice and hate crimes in schools. This is, again, a place where we are able to connect with different groups.

In terms of governance, we've been around a year and a half and we have a core group of about 15 young people who are doing most of the organizing and most of the decision-making. Tension is beginning to increase as we get into more controversial topics and involve older folks on our board. We are dealing with the challenge of how to bring everyone together to make decisions that make sense. There are a lot of different ideas about where we should be headed and who we should be targeting in our campaigns, especially when we're talking about funding and where we want to get support. Our core governance group right now is young people, but I see new challenges in the future as we involve more adults in direction setting for our group. We have to figure out ways to bridge that tension.

There are two things that we're really good at. We've created a family of young people with people who haven't had a family since they came out. We've also figured out how to build broad coalitions in the North Carolina area, and not just in the queer community, and how to open issues up into a larger space and larger dialogue.

Our main struggle is definitely the political climate that we're working in—especially within the public schools, which we're not even able to get into. That would be one of our main struggles. And another would be trying to figure out what the funding climate is like. Up until last week we hadn't had any North Carolina foundations give us any money. One just came through."

Recent Organizing Victory:
A queer magazine ran a racist advertisement. The young people in the Network tried to go speak with the magazine company about it and were ignored. In response, they ran their own ad in the same paper, and began to contact other people and organizations who pay to advertise in the paper, getting them to put out statements. This strategy got the magazine's attention. As a result, the paper established an ad policy which was designed with the input of the young people from North Carolina Lambda Youth Network. Also, the establishment who put out the original ad is no longer allowed to advertise in that paper.

Rebecca Rathje, Youth United for Change (YUC), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
"The base of what Youth United for Change does is building relationships among young people. One of our beliefs is that our communities are in disarray because, for the most part, people are not in relationship with each other. Our schools are the place where we want to bring young people together, to be in relationship with each other and to look at what they have in common so they can be a powerful and united voice for youth. The reason we chose to do organizing in the schools is because that's where you have the largest number of young people coming together with the potential to build on common concerns. Also, the people most affected by the issue of a 'crummy' education system are young people, so they should be the ones making those decisions about what their education looks like, what the vision for public education should be in the future. So those would be our core beliefs.

In terms of our membership, it's low-income high school students in Philadelphia, in particular from the neighborhood schools, not the magnet schools. Right now we organize in three high schools—Kensington, Edison, and Ali—which have some of the lowest achievement rates and the highest drop-out rates, the lowest teacher attendance rates, etc.

Our strategy is very similar to Liz Steinhauser's strategy in Boston. We follow an institution-based model of community organizing. Again, at the core

is the relationship building among young people—young people coming together, identifying those specific issues in the school, doing a listening campaign. They go out to do surveys or go to classrooms; they meet with other student groups and hear what their peers are saying about those issues. They pick the top issues, do research, either in the form of statistical analysis, or sitting down with school officials, and other people who have that information. Then they develop a campaign and a strategy, pick the person who has the power to make that change—sometimes it's the principal, sometimes it's the superintendent, sometimes it's the head security person—and that person becomes the target of the action. Often, they'll get a commitment from that person in a closed-door setting, but inevitably they have a public action where that person makes the promise to the students in front of hundred of people. So the students show their power, get that public commitment, bring the media there. The action is the culmination, and then there is evaluation and reflection.

Of course, training is imperative in all of this. The creation of alternative structures is important, too, in the sense that the schools are sort of self-perpetuating. We feel that schools were developed for the service of young people, but now they're self-serving and have created a very negative environment for youth. Youth United for Change is a place to create positive relationships. We have some pretty strict rules that the students have developed in terms of respect and listening to each other and handling conflict non-violently.

In terms of governance, we have three high schools. At each high school there is a leadership team consisting of anywhere from 15 to 20 young people who meet on a weekly basis. They make the decisions about the issues. That is the most

important part: that the high school students are making the decisions on the issues. A smaller group elected from each leadership team comes together to form a youth governance council and they look at issues across the schools, as well as YUC issues in general. Our Board of Directors is made up predominantly of alumni, a caucus of the youth governance council—because in Pennsylvania people under the age of 18 can't serve on a board of directors—and parents and teachers from the schools.

Capacity—We just did a board/staff retreat and evaluated our mission and everyone said, 'The best thing we're good at is building relationships between young people within the organization and between the young people in the organization and their school.' We're developing very strong youth leaders and doing intense youth organizing in the schools. We've been in some of the schools for five years, and we've been able to see some real changes. We've developed intense relationships with teachers. So, we've been able to really be embedded in those schools, but not to the extent that we are too identified with the power structure. We strive to stay on the outside.

The two biggest challenges we face when organizing in the schools is that we have to get permission from the principal to enter the school and he/she is often the person who becomes the target of our campaigns. So it's a very precarious relationship and you have to nurture that relationship and be very careful. The other thing that is a challenge for me personally is the amount of responsibility I feel for the young people in the organization, because of how little support there is out there for them. We are often the only adult they trust. They tell us everything from 'I want to run away from home' to 'I want to kill myself.' And how do we handle that when we've got 20 other students who are ready to start a meeting?"

Recent Organizing Victory:
YUC has been involved in a two-year crime and safety campaign. At one school in which we are active, there is a long, dark tunnel-bridge that students have to walk under in order to get to school. YUC studied the situation and found a large number of serious incidents were being reported in the tunnel, such as mugging and drug dealing. We wanted the bridge torn down. While this did not occur, YUC succeeded in getting the city to put up lights, to paint the walls, to hire a company to clean up the trash on a regular basis and to put a police monitor in place.

Miya Yoshitani, Asian Pacific Environmental Network (The Laotian Organizing Project), Richmond, California
"The Laotian Organizing Project, where our youth program is housed and which is part of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, is located in one county in California. We believe we are addressing three main conditions, all of which are the basis for the low quality of life in the Laotian community: low access to education, jobs and toxins. Richmond, California is the most toxic city in the area and it's also one of the most toxic cities in the country, with 350 industrial sites. The Laotian community is being incredibly impacted by that, and young people in particular. Our beliefs are that to change these three conditions, it is going to take systemic change—not just policy change in the school, or one policy change in the chemical industry, but a change in the actual systems of whole institutions. We are only three years old, so we don't believe we have the power to do that right now. So we are putting in place strategies that will allow us to get more powerful. We want to make change over time and we see ourselves doing that work over the long haul. How we do that will come out in our strategies, around what we do on a day-to-day basis to actually build that power.

Our membership in the Laotian Organizing Project is composed of primarily young teenage Laotians. Our youth leadership project is directed specifically at teenage Laotian girls. The other members are their parents, welfare recipients in general—we've started another small program area directed at welfare recipients—and Laotian seniors. The Laotian community, just as a point of information, is made up of several different ethnic groups, with distinct language groups and cultural groups. It's one of the smallest ethnic groups among Asian Pacific Islanders in the country, but when we have a meeting we may have to translate into at least three different languages at once. That actually gives you an idea of some of our challenges, too.

Our main strategy is trying to build a community organization in the Laotian community that can address the three major conditions that we're trying to change. The main way we're trying to do that is by doing youth organizing. We promote our youth organizing through a four-year youth development program that does organizing as well. We recruit young Laotian girls out of junior high, the summer before they enter high school—the high school where there is the highest number of Laotian students. We choose young women specifically because of the incidence of cancer and other diseases in the Laotian community (caused by toxins) and because we believe young women have an incredible leadership role to play in he community. The things that we do, in terms of youth development and political education over those four years, are around reproductive health, environmental and community health, environmental justice, culture and identity, and the basics of community organizing.

Another strategy that we employ, aside from this very structured four-year program, which includes a summer program and meetings over the school year, is campaign organizing which is

youth-led. We do work in the schools right now to address the low quality of life in the school system, but we don't anticipate always being in the schools. We're not building a school organization. We're doing organizing in the school because that will help us build a community organization which will be able to address other problems in the community. We also do work around arts and culture, advocacy work—where the younger people go to meetings and advocate for a particular policy change—and training in other kinds of skills, and we do network building.

Our structure includes a core group of youth who make all the decisions around the campaign organizing and the other youth organizing. We have a community advisory board. Aside from that, the annual strategic planning for the Asian Pacific Environmental Network happens on those two levels and then on the staff and board level as well. We have a board that's made up of people from the Asian Pacific Islander community who have been organizing in labor, housing and other environmental justice areas.

Things we do well are political education, consciousness raising and the building of family—building a place where people feel safe, and where young people feel safe to respond to the incredible problems of being a refugee in the United States, of being an immigrant in a state where there are so many oppressive initiatives coming down, and where they can deal with their issues of being bi-cultural and bilingual. Thus far, we have had a very high retention rate in our four-year program.

We have many challenges in our work as well. We don't have the capacity to be everything. We're making a shift in terms of actually doing more organizing and perhaps doing less youth development. The development pieces were a really good catalyst to start a build the initial leadership. We're finding now that one

of our challenges is doing both and that we can't actually continue to build our capacity in both areas. Another challenge is dealing with the adults in the community, the parents who are hard to reach and have less knowledge of English than we need. We also have found that we miss the girls who are already beyond our recruiting age range (e.g., the girls already in high school).

Recent Organizing Victory:
The Laotian Organizing Project celebrated one of its first victories this spring when we convinced local health officials to institute a multi-lingual emergency warning system to be utilized in the event of a toxic emergency. This campaign was developed in response to an explosion at the Chevron Refinery in March in which no effort had been made to translate critical information to local residents in the Laotian community. As part of this campaign, the youth leaders mobilized more than 600 people to sign postcards to the County Department of Health Services demanding that they take action on this issue.

6. Recommendations

Both funders and organizers were committed to leaving the retreat with a set of concrete actions that each group could undertake. During the final session, the group identified the immediate and long-term needs of the youth organizing field and developed the following list of recommendations and action items:

1. Create an organizing institute for young leaders and organizers (perhaps a summer-long session) focused on management, community organizing and fund-raising strategies;

2. Hold annual regional and national youth organizing meetings to share ideas, network and broaden the constituency of youth leaders;

3. Develop a journal for the field;

4. Increase the number of foundations that support emerging youth organizing groups;

5. Gather information on funding pools for youth programming (where are they, what are they funding and how much is available);

6. Create vehicles, such as a funding collaborative, that leverages funding and help youth organizations get started;

7. Form a council of elders/mentors who will support emerging groups and help to incubate new groups;

8. Develop standards for youth organizing similar to those in the field of youth development (methodology, training, strategies);

9. Increase support for the field of youth organizing, including different models of organizing, direct action and technical assistance intermediaries;

10. Institutionalize the work of youth organizing groups to secure their futures and to provide job security for organizers.

7. Conclusion

Although the discussions that took place during this two-day retreat were often difficult and the two groups (funders and organizers) often struggled to communicate, everyone agreed that the retreat was useful and provided an excellent starting point for future endeavors. By the end of the weekend, the group had reached the following conclusions:

Create a funding collaborative
Increasing the resources available to youth organizing projects is crucial. Funders should establish a national collaborative that will leverage funds from large foundations and build awareness of youth organizing in the funding community.

Support the development of youth organizing as a field
Providing resources to build the capacity of fledgling youth organizing groups is essential. Recommendations identified in the above section must be pursued through some kind of capacity building mechanism that strengthens individual organizations and moves the entire field forward.

Host a gathering of youth organizers
Regular meetings of youth organizing professionals is key to the growth and development of the field. The next step is to host a larger gathering of youth organizers that includes discussions about a national conference and the formation of a support network. The eventual goal of these events will be to convene conversations about methods and structures of youth organizing so that the leaders and organizers can conceptualize and direct the emerging field.

The point was repeatedly made that all these initiatives require staff time and resources. Currently, youth organizers are overextended and find it almost impossible to take on the responsibility of planning national or even regional meetings in addition to coordinating their own local campaigns. At the same time, everyone recognizes that funders cannot move forward in their own efforts without input from those in the field. Clearly, this problem needs to be addressed, either with the financial help of individual foundations or through a national funding collaborative.

UPDATE: JANUARY 2000
Since the December, 1998 retreat, there has been notable progress towards the goals of organizing a national funders' collaborative and another retreat. A core group of funders, most of whom were at the retreat, are in the early stages

of formalizing a Youth Organizing Funders Collaborative with the purpose of creating a funding pool of new monies to make grants to emerging and established youth organizing groups and providing capacity building opportunities. Currently the Collaborative is approaching its core members for operating expenses and grant funds. The target goal of a $1 million budget for the first year includes a minimum of $600,000 for grantmaking to grassroots youth organizing projects (hopefully to be distributed starting January 2001); $250,000 for capacity building and technical assistance and $150,000 for a core administrative budget. Housed at the Jewish Fund for Justice, the Collaborative plans to hire a staff director by April, 2000, who will begin surveying youth organizers, writing grantmaking criteria and developing a capacity building agenda. Plans are also underway to bring together a larger group of organizers by Spring 2000 to discuss strategy, current trends in youth organizing work and to further refine components essential to youth organizing.

The work of this group has also catalyzed other initiatives that are attracting additional resources to the field of youth organizing. Many of the organizers are now informally networking and making regular visits to learn from each other. The Hazen Foundation is working with its grantees in the Northeast to host a regional conference on youth organizing. The Public Welfare Foundation also brought their youth organizing and peer educator grantees together this fall to share information and compare strategies. Several funders have begun making youth organizing grants, having learned about the field through presentations made by funders and organizers at meetings of the Neighborhood Funders Group, Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families and the Council on Foundation. The Ford Foundation, in partnership with the Kellogg Foundation, the Center for Community

Change and the National 4-H Council Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, have made significant, multi-year grants to a number of youth organizing groups during the past year through two separate projects.

It is the hope of the funders and organizers that contributed to this report that the field of youth organizing will be broadened and given increased visibility over the next several years so that more young people can take their legitimate place at decision-making table around the country. Through youth organizing projects, young people are given the rare opportunity to develop the leadership and analytical skills to identify issues, craft campaigns, and to negotiate with public officials. As Alexie Torres-Fleming, Director of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, so wisely said, "By supporting youth organizing strategies, we don't give power to young people, but we create the conditions and stage whereby young people can find their own power."