EQUITABLE YOUTH COMPENSATION IN CALIFORNIA YOUTH ORGANIZING

Acknowledgments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth organizing centers young people who are closest to the pain caused by systemic oppression and thus must be the drivers of social transformation. Yet they also face the most systemic challenges dedicating their time to youth organizing. This report shows how compensation makes it possible for youth to engage and persist in organizing. In contrast with other part-time work, often grueling and highly exploitative service jobs, compensation supports the holistic development nurtured by youth organizing spaces. Ultimately, compensation is a key, but not sole, component of how organizations can realize their visions for a world of abundance and care where all can thrive.

However, there is a critical need for more resources and best practices so that organizations can sustainably compensate young people and fully nurture their growth through meaningful paid roles. For example, structural barriers to appropriately compensating undocumented young people, consistent challenges finding sufficient ongoing funding for youth compensation, and limited capacity/infrastructure for organizations to supervise young people in paid roles fosters challenges felt acutely by young people.

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Best Practices and Recommendations from the Field

We briefly summarize best practices and recommendations from the field and for funders below:

1) Meet essential needs for youth to engage in organizing

These foundations must be met to facilitate and sustaining young people’s engagement, including transportation, food, childcare, mental health resources, and health insurance and benefits. Other examples include paid travel opportunities, trainings, and professional development workshops.

2) Strengthen pay, systems, and communications

- **Pay youth the maximum amount, in a timely manner:** Youth should be paid the maximum amount that the organization can afford (rather than expecting negotiation from the lowest salary). Organizational processes and infrastructures help ensure that youth are paid on time.
- **Communicate clearly, consistently, and honestly about compensation:** Verbal and written documentation should clearly communicate details such as pay rate, payment timelines, hours, specific roles, and expectations.

3) Invest in young people beyond the check

- **Invest in the time and support needed for training & onboarding:** Youth need support and caring supervision to nurture their growth in paid roles. Best practices include relationship building, developing workplans to identify youth leader’s strengths and goals, processes for accountability, thorough training, and tailored 1-1 sessions.
- **Build up financial literacy:** Paid roles can be bolstered by cultivating young people’s skills and feeling of confidence around daunting financial systems. Examples include ROTH IRA and tax workshops and partnering with community banks.
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4) Compensate multiple forms of labor, in addition to core organizing work

- Youth leaders should also be compensated for labor such as outreach, speaking at events, sharing their stories, participating in research, & attending trainings and meetings where young people are engaging in skill building and contributing to campaign planning.

5) Center young people's voices around policies and practices around compensation

- Young people's voices should be centered in shaping equitable policies and weighing in on the form of compensation that makes the most sense for their needs. Especially since compensation can be a sensitive topic, young people need to feel safe to bring up questions and concerns. Organizations can proactively create space for young people to do so (e.g. through 1-1’s and anonymous surveys).

6) Systematize resourcing young people within our organizing models

- Strategies include partnerships and collaboration to fund fellowships or share other resources. Organizations have also prioritized youth compensation as a resourcing/redistribution principle.
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Recommendations for Funders

- **Center Youth Voice**: Provide opportunities for shared decision-making with young people over grantmaking and youth compensation practices in your program work.

- **Prioritize meaningfully resourcing and developing young people within program work**: Provide the maximum compensation and take into account young people’s preparation and emotional labor for work such as preparing and speaking as panelists, spokespeople, facilitators, or trainers and participating in interviews, listening sessions, and/or focus groups.

- **Commit to resourcing young people within grantmaking**: Commit to providing grants that can support meaningful, paid youth roles and organizational capacity to invest in the supervision of young people—especially at the rate necessary to sufficiently compensate them for their labor.

- **Lift up and support organizational practices around meaningfully compensating and supporting young people**: Ask organizations about their best practices in meaningfully compensating young people. Identify and lift up these examples to celebrate and inspire other organizations and foundations, and to adopt in your own practices.

- **Identify other forms of philanthropic resources that can be shared or redirected to young people**: Actively look for ways to leverage non-cash compensation and opportunities for young people.

Investing in compensation for youth leaders is, as one focus group participant put it, “investing in change” on multiple levels. Compensation not only gets young BIPOC through the door—it also further fuels their commitment and enthusiasm, with implications for long-term engagement in movements. When multiplied, these efforts can support the growth and strength of movements for social justice.