



BAY AREA YOUTH ORGANIZING : OPPORTUNITIES AND NEEDS FROM THE FIELD



THIS MOMENT

Our nation is facing a wave of attacks to hard-won victories for racial, gender, economic, LGBTQ, and environmental justice. We see this in the separation of immigrant families and refugees, in unabated police brutality and mass incarceration of Black communities, in efforts to dismantle public education, labor unions, reproductive justice, LGBTQ TGNC¹ rights, and environmental protections. We see this in the displacement of and disinvestment in low-income youth and families of color, which have been especially heightened and painful in the Bay Area.

“There are a lot of challenges-- the most prominent is trauma whether recent or generational...Especially in my community, we see native San Franciscans being pushed out of their homes, being kicked out of school, not being able to afford to live and survive in the city we helped build. I think that has a huge detriment on our success as people.... [But] what motivates me is building relationships with other people... Every step I take from this point...you’re always putting that positive energy for the benefit of others. ”

- Rosie Balberan, Coleman Advocates

Young people have responded in cities and towns across America by organizing to resist and reimagine our collective futures - to name just a few among many, the Dreamers, Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, and the March for Our Lives. In doing so, they extend the historical legacy of young people who have long been at the forefront of transformative movements for justice and equity: from the Philadelphia mill children’s strike in 1903, to 1950’s and 60’s civil rights organizing - Little Rock 9, the Black Panthers, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee - to the anti-war and free speech movements.

IMPACT OF YOUTH ORGANIZING²

Youth organizing transforms society through a “quadruple bottom line.”³ As shown in Appendix A, youth organizing includes but also extends beyond youth development, leadership, and civic engagement. That is, youth organizing cultivates the strengths of young people while transforming the conditions and systems that impact them most. Through youth organizing, young people develop their civic engagement leadership, and capacities in ways that:

1. Improve their own well-being: Youth organizing takes a holistic approach by supporting the academic, mental health, and well-being of its members.⁴

2. Stay academically and civically engaged for the long term: Youth organizing alumni are about twice as likely as their peers to be civically and politically engaged,⁵ and more likely to attend a four-year college.⁶

3. Positively influence peers and families: For example, youth leaders encourage the civic and political engagement of people around them.⁷

4. Make long-lasting change by winning policies and practices that improve community well-being: For example, Bay Area youth organizing victories include: more equitable school funding, criminal justice reforms, financial aid for undocumented students in California, dismantling the school to prison pipeline, free MUNI passes, and reclaiming public space.

The transformative consequences of youth organizing include and extend far beyond the individuals who participate:

“At Californians for Justice I found a space to change my education. And it was all students, like myself, through their leadership and engagement that made the kind of school transformation we want to see more possible. Because we are so much more than any stereotype, outcome, or test score. We are the future generation.”

- Naudika Williams, Californians for Justice Alum, Oakland High School



BAY AREA YOUTH ORGANIZING LANDSCAPE

Youth organizing in the Bay Area was shaped by a wave of propositions attacking youth and communities of color in the mid-90's - early 2000's, such as Proposition 209 (which banned affirmative action), Proposition 187 (denying undocumented immigrants access to public social services), Proposition 21 (increasing criminalization of youth), and Proposition 54 (prohibiting the state to collect data by race).

Through the momentum galvanized by these fights, and particularly the No on Prop 21 campaign, youth redefined models for youth-led organizations and campaigns. In the decades that followed, young people built youth organizing institutions such as API Youth Promoting Advocacy & Leadership, Californians for Justice, Coleman Advocates / Youth Making a Change, Oakland Kids First, Youth Together, Youth United for Community Action, and more. These organizations and others have continued to adapt in nimble ways to changing political contexts while remaining deeply rooted in the needs of most impacted communities.

California's relatively progressive landscape is no mistake, nor a function of demography as destiny. Rather, it's been hard won through long-term movement building of communities of color and investments in movement infrastructure.⁸

Community needs and growing youth organizing infrastructure most recently gave rise to organizations such as the RYSE Center, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice, Urban Peace Movement, and Black Organizing Project. Each of these organizations have responded to the trauma experienced by youth in most impacted communities through their focus on healing-centered youth organizing that builds both resilience and resistance.



YOUTH ORGANIZING DEFINED

"Youth organizing relies on the power and leadership of young people: they define issues in their communities that are most relevant to them, develop an analysis of the problem, and enlist peers to design and advocate for systemic solutions. As such, youth organizing focuses on individual and collective leadership."⁹

BAY AREA YOUTH ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES

Cultivate Youth Leaders and Build Organizational Capacity

1. Invest in leadership pathways for youth and staff that: 1) Support youth leaders during the critical transition period after high school, 2) Move youth leaders into staff roles and support them throughout multiple levels of the organization, and 3) Place youth and staff in spaces of governance through internships, staff positions, boards and commissions, and elected office.

2. Support the time and space organizations need to build capacity by: 1) Investing in capacities of the leaders themselves by providing structure, support, and compensation for developing and learning, 2) Building a cadre of YO trainers compensated to provide skill shares, trainings, train the trainer series, and/or toolkits for other YO organizations, and 3) Developing field tested systems toolkits, rubrics, evaluations, and best practices.



Sharpen Key Strategies for Change

3. Accelerate cultural strategy¹⁰ and narrative work that: 1) Develops synergistic visions, stories, and art by and for young people, and 2) Develops strategic communications plans, messaging, and frames to shift the terms of debates and deeply held perceptions of youth of color.

4. Deepen integrated voter engagement to: 1) Develop young people to lead conversations that redefine civic engagement and grassroots governance, 2) Connect the dots between alumni engagement efforts and leadership roles in civic engagement campaigns, 3) Sharpen youth-led tactics to leverage electoral power to hold institutions accountable to communities they serve.

Build a Bigger We

5. Invest in displaced families through outer Bay Area infrastructure and capacity building (e.g. Stockton, Antioch, Fairfield) by resourcing: 1) Organizations working to organize black families in these communities, and 2) Regional networks and cross-regional alliances that reach into the outer Bay Area.

6. Increase cross-regional and cross-issue organizing through networks and movement building spaces that: 1) Invests in hubs, coalitions, and alliances that serve as the connective tissue to build relationships, capacity, and collective power across issues and communities.

Resource the Work

7. Activate a wider range of funders and donors by: 1) Encouraging support in creative fundraising and ways to leverage capital for community assets, 2) Conducting education among other funders, and 3) Investing in organizations by providing more unrestricted and flexible funds.

INNOVATIONS IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH ORGANIZING

Bay Area youth organizing groups have the opportunity to lead the state and nation in testing and refining models that meet the growing needs and opportunities of this political moment. Funders can support the following next generation models in the youth organizing field:

1. Organizing to Scale

Creates intentional linkages between spontaneous movement spaces where young people are being activated, and youth organizing groups that offer deep leadership development, political education, and campaign organizing. This looks like: 1) Sustaining movement momentum by connecting young people to ongoing digital activism led by youth organizing groups, and 2) Moving young people from online activism to offline mobilizations and tactics to support local power building and campaign efforts.

2. Cultural Strategy

Centers art, story, and creativity to generate collective campaign vision and strategy. This looks like: 1) Partnerships between arts-focused initiatives or individuals and organizing groups around shared issues and campaigns, and 2) Youth-led creation spaces for story collection, art, and expression as central to campaign strategy and narrative change.



3. Integrated Voter Engagement

Within a youth organizing context combines the power of long-term base building, leadership development, and grassroots organizing with electoral mobilization.¹¹ This looks like: 1) Creating leadership pipelines with paid roles for youth and alumni within field campaigns that includes leadership development and political education, and 2) Creating ongoing spaces for youth and alumni to mobilize their communities using online and offline strategies to build an active electoral base.

4. Grassroots Governance

Strengthens the power of youth in decision-making spaces, from elected bodies, commissions, youth councils, and boards in institutions throughout our communities (schools, nonprofits, government, etc.) through identifying shared values, agendas, and strategies. This looks like: 1) Building structured connections (e.g. hubs, networks) between these positions and grassroots efforts for change, and 2) Creating pathways to develop youth from impacted communities to represent in these positions of power and influence.

5. Healing Centered Organizing

Creates spaces to address the holistic needs of youth members, who are impacted by daily trauma, while working for personal and community transformation. This looks like: 1) Organizing models that offer support services (e.g. wellness programs, healing spaces, and academic support) alongside leadership development and campaign work, and 2) Integrating healing centered practices through staff training, organizational practices, and protocols for resolving conflict and healing from trauma.



CALL TO ACTION









As funders, movement allies, and individuals who believe in the power of young people to dream, design, and drive social transformation -- we call on you to take action.

- Listen to the voices of young people and grassroots organizations to define the direction, collaborations, and support that they need to transform themselves and their communities.
- Reflect on the role young people play within your foundation or organization and identify ways to strengthen meaningful youth voice and decision making from within.
- Invest in both emerging and established organizations who are building new models for youth organizing with pathways for engagement, leadership, and lifelong social change work.

“The beauty of youth organizing is that you’re going to create a group of people with a lifelong commitment to social justice, to making a difference in their community. Even if young people don’t follow my footsteps...whatever they do is going to ground them in those values and skills that will permeate in different organizations and spaces.”

- Jamileh Ebrahimi, Organizing Director, RYSE Center

APPENDIX A

	Intervention	Development	Collective Empowerment	Systemic Change	
The YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM	YOUTH SERVICES	YOUTH DEVELOPMENT	YOUTH LEADERSHIP	YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	YOUTH ORGANIZING
Supporting YOUNG PEOPLE as:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clients  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participants  ▶ Youth Workers  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participants ▶ Youth Workers ▶ Leaders  ▶ Staff Board  ▶ Members  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participants  ▶ Youth Workers ▶ Leaders ▶ Staff Board ▶ Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Leaders  ▶ Board Members ▶ Staff Organizers ▶ Members
Providing them with SERVICES and OPPORTUNITIES:	Provide supports to address individual problems and behavior by helping young people with basic needs (personal, health, safety, etc.).	<p>Plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Access to caring adults and safe spaces + Opportunities for youth / adult partnerships + Age appropriate support 	<p>Plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Authentic youth leadership opportunities built into programming and organization + Opportunities to participate in community projects 	<p>Plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Opportunities to engage young people in advocacy and negotiation + Engaging young people in political education and awareness 	<p>Plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Involves youth as part of core leadership and governing body + Engages in alliances and coalitions + Builds and develops a base of youth
Focused PROGRAMMING on:	TREATMENT + PREVENTION — Meeting young people where they are	GROWTH + DEVELOPMENT — Building individual competencies	CAPACITY + SKILLS BUILDING — Supporting young people as decision makers and problem solvers	CAPACITY BUILDING — For power analysis and action, and negotiation around issues identified by young people.	CAPACITY BUILDING FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION — Engaging in recruitment, popular education, and campaign development around issues identified by young people.
What it Looks Like... With Education Reform (College Access):	To ensure that students can focus on school work, school lunch programs offer free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch to students that meet eligibility requirements.	Academic enrichment programs that support middle or high schools students with academic tutoring, college counseling and life preparation.	Leadership programs that provide eligible youth with leadership development opportunities to engage as active leaders on school campuses through student government and district-wide school councils.	Youth leaders research college readiness and access by designing and collecting 1,000 surveys from students. Based on survey findings, youth leaders develop policy recommendations to increase college readiness and access.	Youth leaders are a part of a coalition with parents and teachers to reduce racial/ethnic disparities and increase college access for all students. Youth build collective power for policies that make college preparatory classes mandatory for all students and increase college counselors on campus.

Source: Prepared for The Heinz Endowments' Education Program by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing in partnership with the Movement Strategy Center. 2012. The Power of Transformative Youth Leadership: A Field Analysis of Youth Organizing in Pittsburgh.

APPENDIX B

This report draws from Movement Strategy Center (MSC), which in partnership with The San Francisco Foundation, mapped the ecosystem of hundreds of youth development groups in the Bay Area region. They then conducted interviews and questionnaires with staff from 20 youth organizing anchor groups representing geographic, population, and issue-area diversity. The organizations are based in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, and San Francisco counties, including East Palo Alto, Oakland (East, West, North), Richmond (North, Iron Triangle, Beldingwoods, Santa Fe, Coronado) and San Francisco (Mission/Excelsior). The groups focus on a range of issues, including but not limited to: immigrant and refugee justice, education, anti-racism, environmental justice, gentrification/ displacement, and voter engagement.

Issue Area	Organizations
Immigrant and Refugee Justice	AYPAL, AROC, Urban Tilth , Power California, YUCA
Anti-Violence	ASATA, Bay Peace, Urban Peace Movement
Anti-Racism/ Racial Justice	ASATA, AROC, Black Organizing Project, CFJ, CURYJ, Justice for Oakland Students, Oakland Kids First, Youth Together, RYSE
Education Justice	AYPAL, Black Organizing Project, CFJ, GSA Network, Justice for Oakland Students, PODER, Oakland Kids First (REAL HARD), Youth Together, YUCA, RYSE
Economic Justice	ASATA, Urban Peace Movement
Criminalization of Black & Brown Youth/ Prison Reform/ Abolition/ Restorative Justice	Black Organizing Project, CURYJ, Justice for Oakland Students, Oakland Kids First, Youth Together, RYSE
Housing and Anti-Displacement, Gentrification	APEN, PODER, Urban Tilth, YUCA
Environmental Justice	APEN, CBE, YUCA
Gender and LGBTQ Justice	Brown Boi Project, GSA Network
Civic Engagement	APEN, Bay Rising, CFJ, CBE, CPA, Oakland Rising, Power California, RYSE, SF Rising, YUCA
Arts	Bay Peace, Hip Hop for Change, RYSE

ENDNOTES

1 Trans and gender non-conforming: GNC, or gender nonconformity, is defined by GSA Network as a “term used to describe a person’s identity or expression of gender. A GNC person may express their gender through the clothes they wear, the activities they engage in, the pronouns they use, and/or their mannerisms. This expression may embrace masculinity, femininity, neither, or both. Gender nonconformity is also an umbrella term used to describe various gender identities such as genderqueer, gender fluid, boi, gender neutral, and/or transgender.” From Burdge, Hilary, Zami Hyemingway, and Adela Licona. 2014. Gender Nonconforming Youth: Discipline Disparities, School Push-Out, and the School to Prison Pipeline.

2 Also see Appendix A

3 Tran, Mark. 2013. “Young People Create a Quadruple Bottom Line: Can You Beat That?” We ‘Ced Youth Media. Retrieved June 6, 2018 (<http://wecedyouth.org/2013/04/young-people-create-a-quadruple-bottom-line-can-you-beat-that/>).

4 Chavez-Diaz, M. and N. Lee. 2015. A Conceptual Mapping of Healing Centered Youth Organizing: Building a Case for Healing Justice. Working Paper. Unpublished. Oakland, CA: Urban Peace Movement.

Lee, Nicole. 2014. Healing-Centered Youth Organizing: A Framework for Youth Leadership in the 21st Century. Oakland, CA: Urban Peace Movement. Ginwright, Shawn. 2015. Hope and Healing in Urban Education: How Urban Activists and Teachers Are Reclaiming Matters of the Heart. New York: Routledge. Shah, Seema. 2011. Building Transformative Youth Leadership: New York City: Funders Collaborative for Youth Organizing.

5 Rogers, John and Veronica Terriquez. 2013. The Impact of Youth Organizing on the Educational and Civic Trajectories of Low-Income Youth. Los Angeles: Institute for Democracy, Education and Access.

6 Terriquez and Rogers 2013

7 Terriquez, Veronica and Hyeyoung Kwon. 2015. “Intergenerational Family Relations, Civic Organisations, and the Political Socialisation of Second-Generation Immigrant Youth.” Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 41(3):425–47.

8 Pastor, Manuel. 2018. State of Resistance: What California’s Dizzying Descent and Remarkable Resurgence Mean for America’s Future. The New Press.

9 Shah, Seema. 2011. Building Transformative Youth Leadership: New York City: Funders Collaborative for Youth Organizing.

10 Cultural strategy is a comprehensive approach to organizing that is centered in visioning, strategy, planning, and action embedded in art, story, and creativity.

11 https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/M3_web.pdf

