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TO: YO! CALI PUBLIC FUNDING RESEARCH AD HOC WORKING GROUP

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SUBJECT: CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRIVATE FUNDERS IN SUPPORTING YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS' ACCESS TO PUBLIC FUNDS

Thanks to once-in-a-generation federal and state investments such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, Community Schools Partnership Program, and Prop 64 Cannabis Tax Funds, significant public funding is potentially available to youth organizations in low-income communities of color across California. A recent landscape assessment conducted by YO! Cali indicates that youth organizations are very interested in applying for public funding: thirty-five of 39 (90%) survey respondents have applied for public funding in the past, and 38 of 39 (97%) say they are interested in applying for public funding in the future. Given this, how can private philanthropy support youth organizations in low-income communities of color in accessing public funding?

Earlier this month, the Funders Network, Health and Environmental Funders Network, and the Neighborhood Funders Group released a [report](#) that offers recommendations (excerpted below) for how their members can support the distribution of public dollars to frontline communities:

1. Boost the operating muscle of grassroots groups by providing financial support to hire grant writers, paying for accounting services and tools, covering staff travel costs to attend agency meetings, providing general operating funds, and otherwise build organizational capacity
2. Create connections, open doors by providing opportunities for CBOs, funders, and government officials to form new and stronger relationships and improve coordination around public funding opportunities
3. Expand funding horizons and strategies by breaking away from issue- and project-based funding, instead taking a long-term, holistic approach that favors multi-year, unrestricted as well as wealth- and asset-building grants, debt capital support, bridge funding, and other strategic support
4. Support accountability work that holds government agencies and corporations accountable and defends good projects and partnerships by providing audit, legal, media outreach, and other support when needed
5. Raise your voice to ensure investments go where they are needed most and prove that committing public funds to improve conditions for frontline communities is an effective model for future public investment.

These recommendations amplify considerations that emerged from the interviews that LFA conducted to inform development of the playbook for accessing public funding. We heard a lot about the need for capacity-building, the importance of relationships, and the wisdom of taking a longer-term, holistic perspective. The playbook, in

highlighting specific considerations for finding, applying for, using, and reporting on public funding, raises awareness for private funders about the complexities and tradeoffs that youth organizations face when accessing public funding opportunities. Beyond the specific lessons described in the playbook, here are some higher-level considerations for private funders to keep in mind:

- **Staying grounded in purpose.** While encouraging pursuit of public funding can be appealing because larger amounts of revenue can have greater impact in the community, funders must be careful to not inadvertently contribute to mission creep of organizations. Scaling programs that are not tightly aligned with the organization's purpose can be a distraction – for instance, because public funding sources often reward lower cost bids, this can work against an organization's efforts to sustain living wages for its staff. Even worse, accepting public funds might complicate an organization's efforts to influence an entity in its advocacy work. Advocacy for public funding allocations can be like rototilling a barren field- once the soil is loosened, some desired plants like California natives will germinate, but many opportunistic, non-native plants will also take root. Public funding is competitive, and there are no "dibs" for those who advocated for their establishment. Private funders should help organizations stay grounded in their mission and encourage internal clarity on how the public funding opportunity helps them grow in ways that are in keeping with its identity. Indeed, private funders (who have greater positional power, government connections, and perhaps, emergent practices of participatory funding) can better achieve their aims by applying pressure on public funders to approach this work differently.
- **Relationships matter.** We heard that organizations often find out about opportunities – and how to pursue those opportunities – through relationships with funders, public officials, and other organizations doing similar work. While it may be useful to have a resource like a clearinghouse of grant opportunities, it may be even more helpful for private funders to share their networks and create spaces for collaboration so that organizations can connect on sourcing opportunities, partner to successfully apply and use public funds, and mentor others so they can build capacity and develop technical expertise. Private funders can, for instance, inform public officials about good work that community organizations are doing in their jurisdictions (and make sure they get invited to community events and annual fundraisers/celebrations) - one youth organization staff noted that while they have good contacts with local officials, they could use introductions to state-level officials in more distant Sacramento.
- **Capacity-building as organizational growth and learning.** Navigating public funding processes requires a higher level of expertise in development and financial management but it's important to approach capacity-building holistically so there is collective, organizational learning. Some smaller youth orgs found success in doing grant management and reporting by committee through biweekly meetings for sharing insights and sense-making - this approach reduces isolation that oftentimes comes with staffing specialization and builds capacity as an organizational growth strategy. Private funders need to take care when supporting capacity-building to make sure it's not focused just on the technical and transactional aspects of the public funding process. Private funders might support collaborative capacity-building efforts modeled on what California Children's Trust and Public Works Alliance are doing to build the capacity (financial management, grant writing and reporting, program data collection, etc.) of a network 20 organizations who work with justice involved youth so that they that can bill Medi-Cal.

In addition to the general considerations that flow out of the interview findings, we offer a couple of tactical recommendations, one bold and one more modest:

- A major hurdle for any organizations that is interested in applying for public funding is the need to have

adequate cash reserves since most public grants and contracts are done on a reimbursement basis (the California Association of Nonprofits and others are working with the legislature on proposed reforms). Might private funders set up a pooled, revolving loan fund specifically for smaller orgs since the current situation is so inequitable to them?

- As to the development of a clearinghouse of public funding opportunities, the challenge will be maintaining the information so that it is up-to-date and easily searchable and shareable. To illustrate how messy this task would be, Exhibit A is a running list of the funding sources mentioned in the interviews we conducted. To clean, organize, post, and refresh such a list would be quite labor-intensive. Such a task is well-suited for generative artificial intelligence. Exhibit B shows results from two simple prompts that took only seconds to generate. Private funders can sponsor a technician to create a resource using AI that would automate such searches and provide current information.

EXHIBIT A: Public funding sources mentioned in interviews

- [Elevate Youth CA](#) - public-private partnership to distribute millions of dollars of Prop 64 (Adult Marijuana Act) public funds
- [The California Partnership for the Future of Learning \(futureoflearningca.org\)](#). \$4.7B in community schools funding, \$3B is Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (after-school).
- [The Center Receives Additional \\$16.3 Million to Support Youth Suicide Prevention in California - The Center at Sierra Health Foundation \(shfcenter.org\)](#)
- [Transforming LA through Partnership](#) aims to increase community access to needed services by building the capacity of trusted, smaller organizations to compete for and obtain LA County Department of Mental Health contracts.
- [Tri-City Community Wellbeing grants](#) – grants of up to \$10,000 to fund a project that enhances the mental and emotional wellbeing of residents in Claremont, La Verne and Pomona.
- [California Youth Behavioral Health Initiative](#): \$369M evidence-based practices grants- Round 4 is youth-driven programming
- [The California Children’s Trust Initiative: Financing New Approaches to Achieve Child Well-Being](#) (July 2019) lists federal and state sources.
 - Federal (page 5): Medicaid 1915(b) and 1115(a) Waiver Renewal Opportunities; Enhanced Federal Matching Funds Available for Data Sharing; The Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act (SIPPRA); Integrated Care for Kids (InCK) Model
 - State (page 8): Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) (Proposition 63); Proposition 64 (Cannabis tax); Mental Health Plan (MHP) financing reforms
 - Evidence-Based and Community-Defined Evidence Practices Grants: On March 8, 2024, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), in partnership with the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC), awarded \$67 million to 99 organizations, across 30 counties, to scale early intervention programs and practices that provide mental health and wellness services to children, youth, and young adults in California.
- The California Children’s Trust [Youth Supporting Youth](#): Implementation of SB 803, beginning in July 2022 – opportunity for expanding school-based peer-to-peer programs to youth ages 14 – 17- Youth Supporting Youth: Expanding Peer-to-Peer Programs to Address the Growing Youth Mental Health Crisis
- [Expansion of Youth Access Criteria for California’s Medicaid Family Therapy Benefits](#)
- [New Provider Classifications under Medi-Cal](#): New classifications include: Peer-to-Peer Certification; Behavioral Health Coaches in schools; Community Health Outreach Workers/Promotores; Doulas
- [YouthSource Centers Peer Specialists](#): One of four new provider types in MediCal. LA Workforce Board is starting to invest federal training dollars in this work and could be a new public funding source worth exploring.
- [Ready to Rise](#): Multi-million dollar public-private partnership between Liberty Hill Foundation, the California Community Foundation and the Los Angeles County Probation Department
- Youth Forward: [Resources](#)

EXHIBIT B: Results generated from ChatGPT prompts (conducted on August 27, 2024)

Prompt: Where can I find public funding grants and contracts that are available for youth organizations in California?

To find public funding grants and contracts available for youth organizations in California, you can explore the following resources:

1. Grants.gov

- **Website:** [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)
- **Details:** A comprehensive portal for finding and applying for federal grants. Use the search feature to filter grants by state, such as California, and by category, including youth services.

2. California Grants Portal

- **Website:** [California Grants Portal](https://www.calgrantsportal.org/)
- **Details:** This portal provides a one-stop-shop for all grants offered by California state agencies. You can search specifically for grants related to youth organizations.

3. Youth Funding Opportunity Search (YFOS)

- **Website:** [Youth.gov](https://www.youth.gov/yfoc)
- **Details:** Managed by the U.S. government, Youth.gov offers a search tool to find federal funding opportunities relevant to youth programs.

4. Foundation Directory Online

- **Website:** [Candid.org](https://www.candid.org/)
- **Details:** This is a database of grantmakers and grants. While it focuses on private foundations, it also lists some government funding. Access to the full database usually requires a subscription, but some public libraries offer free access.

5. Local Government Websites

- **City and County Websites:** Check your local city and county websites, such as the City of Los Angeles or San Francisco, for specific grants and contracts available to youth organizations.

6. California Department of Education (CDE)

- **Website:** CDE Funding Opportunities
- **Details:** The CDE offers various grants that might be applicable to youth organizations, particularly those involved in education and after-school programs.

7. Community Foundations

- **Examples:**
 - Silicon Valley Community Foundation ([Website](https://www.siliconvalleycf.org/))
 - California Community Foundation ([Website](https://www.calccf.org/))
- **Details:** These foundations often have grant programs that support youth services in specific regions within California.

8. Request for Proposals (RFP) Listings

- **Website:** [California Contract Register](#)
- **Details:** The California eProcurement website lists RFPs from state agencies, some of which may be relevant to youth organizations.

These resources should provide a good starting point for finding public funding grants and contracts for your youth organization in California.

Prompt: What are specific City and County sources that youth organizations in California can apply for public funding?

Youth organizations in California can access public funding through a variety of city and county sources. Here's a list of specific types of sources they can explore:

1. Local City and County Government Grants

- **City General Funds:** Many cities allocate a portion of their general funds to support youth services. Check the city's budget documents or contact the city manager's office for information.
- **County Boards of Supervisors:** County supervisors often allocate funds for youth services as part of their community development or social services budgets.
- **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG):** Some cities and counties offer these federal funds for youth programs, especially those targeting low-income communities.
- **Parks and Recreation Departments:** Cities and counties often fund youth sports, after-school programs, and recreational activities through their parks and recreation departments.
- **Public Health Departments:** Funding may be available for programs addressing youth health, mental health, substance abuse prevention, and similar services.
- **Human Services/Family Services Departments:** Many counties have funds earmarked for programs supporting families and children, including after-school programs, mentoring, and family counseling.

2. Specific City Examples

- **Los Angeles County:**
 - **Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS):** Offers grants and contracts for youth services.
 - **Los Angeles Youth Development Department:** Focuses on funding youth programs, especially for at-risk youth.
- **San Francisco:**
 - **San Francisco Children and Families Commission (First 5 San Francisco):** Provides grants for programs serving children from birth to age 5.
 - **Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families (DCYF):** Offers a wide range of grants and funding opportunities for youth-serving organizations.
- **San Diego:**
 - **San Diego County Community Enhancement Program:** Funds arts, cultural, and youth programs.
 - **San Diego Youth Services:** A nonprofit organization that partners with the city and county to offer funding and services for youth programs.
- **Sacramento:**
 - **City of Sacramento Youth, Parks, and Community Enrichment Department:** Provides grants for youth sports, after-school programs, and other youth activities.
 - **Sacramento County Department of Health Services:** Offers funding for mental health, substance abuse prevention, and other youth-focused health services.

3. Regional and County-Level Examples

- **Orange County:**
 - **Orange County Community Foundation:** While technically a nonprofit, this foundation manages a variety of county-specific funds for youth organizations.
 - **Orange County Health Care Agency:** Offers grants for mental health and substance abuse prevention services targeted at youth.
- **Alameda County:**
 - **Alameda County Social Services Agency:** Provides funding for child welfare, juvenile justice, and family support services.
 - **First 5 Alameda County:** Offers funding for early childhood programs, including those that serve families with young children.

4. Special Initiatives and Programs

- **Youth Workforce Development Grants:** Many counties, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, offer specific funding for job training and youth employment initiatives.
- **Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs:** Several cities and counties have initiatives to fund youth violence prevention programs, such as the **Los Angeles Mayor's Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD)** program.
- **Youth Homelessness Initiatives:** Counties like San Francisco and Los Angeles have specific funding streams for addressing youth homelessness.

5. School Districts

- **Local Education Agencies (LEAs):** Some school districts have funding for after-school programs, tutoring, mental health services, and more. These are often available through partnerships with community organizations.

6. Public Safety/Police Departments

- **Police Department Grants:** Some cities provide funding through their police departments for youth diversion programs, mentoring, and community outreach initiatives.

How to Apply

- **Stay Informed:** Keep an eye on city and county websites, attend local government meetings, and network with local government officials to stay updated on funding opportunities.
- **Grant Writing:** Ensure you have a solid grant writing team or consultant to apply for these funds, as competition can be stiff.
- **Partnerships:** Consider partnering with other local organizations or government agencies to strengthen your application.

Each city and county may have unique funding opportunities, so it's essential to research the specific areas where your organization operates.