

book one:



STORIES AND LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

by Marisha Wignaraja and P. Catlin Fullwood
Edited by Ami Nagle

culture and context

About the Ms. Foundation for Women

The Ms. Foundation supports the efforts of women and girls to govern their own lives and influence the world around them. Through its leadership, expertise, and financial support, the Foundation champions an equitable society by effecting change in public consciousness, law, philanthropy and social policy.

Our work is guided by our vision of a just and safe world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability or age. We believe that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person are valued.

About the Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change

Launched in 2000, the Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change (CFYS) grew out of an effort of funders and youth practitioners to support work at the intersection of youth development, youth organizing, and gender. The Ms. Foundation was known for understanding the importance of gender in the lives of young women and men. It was one of the first foundations to promote the merging of youth development and youth organizing strategies. And, it was ready to learn and share stories about how youth organizations were combining youth development, youth organizing, and gender-based programming in their work.

CFYS included a five year cycle (2000-2005) of grantmaking, capacity building, networking and learning. CFYS raised \$2.8 million and engaged 12 youth organizations (represented by staff and youth leaders) and 20 donors in this collaborative partnership. Grantee partner organizations received three-year grants, with additional in-kind assistance for capacity building, networking, and an annual meeting to advance learning among staff and youth of grantee organizations and donor partners.

CFYS was a national partnership representing diverse organizations and people including:

- **Grantee Partners** – adults, youth, and organizations and programs that represent diversities in identity, location, and type of social change work.
- **Donor Partners** - individuals, women's funds, community foundations, family foundations, and corporate and independent foundations that represent the breadth of philanthropy.
- **Ms. Foundation Staff and Consultants** - experts in program development, research, capacity building, communications, and development.

The Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change worked to demonstrate the power and possibility of young women and men to create positive change in their lives and their communities. As a national partnership representing a range of diversities including race, class, gender, sexuality, age, immigration status, location, and type of social change, CFYS supported organizations that promoted gender and identity-conscious youth leadership and social change in local communities and beyond.

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Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change
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Introduction: Charting New Territory

“...with struggles come resilience — the ability to become stronger due to hurdles. People here do this through a sense of humor, a connection to the land, firm ties to family and friends, and spirituality. In addition, creativity and creative solutions are embraced here where voice takes many shapes and resistance many forms.”

— Michelle Gaines,
Appalachian Women’s Leadership Project.
Taken from “Voices from Appalachia:
Telling the Stories of Class, Poverty,
and Pride in Rural West Virginia.”

At a time when the youth development field is strong in theory and practice, and youth organizing is emerging as a powerful approach, it is critical that youth practitioners and funders understand the importance of combining strategies from the two fields. The Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change (CFYS) sought to chart new territory by bringing these fields together to explore the strength of their union, making explicit efforts to address issues of gender, race, and age, and identifying key approaches to successful efforts.

Central to this work was the integration of identity in effective youth-led social change. Identity—for youth and staff, organization, and community

– emerged as a critical link. CFYS introduces the term **Cultural Context** to represent these multiple identities. This report illustrates how understanding the impact of cultural context on youth development and youth organizing efforts has led to new approaches to youth-led social change.

Culture and Context: Stories and Lessons from the Field synthesizes the effort’s key findings. The report is divided into three books:

- **Book I:** *Stories and Lessons from the Field* identifies themes and knowledge gained from the project and outlines recommendations for the field and donors. The book describes CFYS and offers lessons for the field and those working with youth-development or youth-organizing groups. This work builds on *Power and Possibilities*, the first report summarizing the efforts of the Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change, published in 2003.

Critical to Book I, are the *Voices from the Field* stories and *Ideas in Action* examples. Raising the voices of youth and adult program partners was critical to this work and thus central to understanding the impact of CFYS. Authored by grantee partners, “Voices from the Field” are first-hand accounts from West Virginia, Milwaukee, Denver, San Francisco, and Oakland that describe the core issues faced by organizations working at the intersect of youth development, youth organizing, and gender. “Ideas in Action” are examples provided by our grantee partners that illustrate key points.

- **Book II:** *Capacity Building for Youth-Led Social Change* describes the intensive capacity-building effort undertaken by CFYS partners and offers key suggestions for the field on structuring supportive capacity-building.
- **Book III:** *Voices from the Field*. Raising the voices of youth and adult program partners was critical to the work of CFYS and thus central to understanding its overall impact. Authored by grantee partners, “Voices from the Field” are first-hand accounts from West Virginia, Milwaukee, Denver, San Francisco, and Oakland that describe the core issues faced by organizations working at the intersect of youth development, youth organizing, and gender.

Key Themes: At the Intersection of Youth Development and Youth Organizing

“The intersect with the Ms. Foundation allowed GSMA to go beyond the normal of leadership development and community service, and moved our programming options further towards preparing girls for social action.”

— Tammy Rivera,
Girls Scouts of the Milwaukee Area.
Taken from “Girls Scouts and Social
Change: Community Action Teams.”

“There is such great potential of teenagers’ understanding and participating in social change. And yet, we are still faced with a paucity of programs that really bring together youth development and youth leadership. CFYS has worked to change this.”

— Amy Liss, Liss Foundation
CFYS Donor Partner

Over the past three years organizations engaged in the Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change participated in a learning laboratory— testing new ideas and refining approaches. The key themes generated by this learning laboratory have implications for other organizations undertaking youth development and youth organizing as well as for anyone who works with youth in shaping the world around them.

Throughout this effort two overarching themes surfaced: the importance of cultural context to successful program implementation, and focusing on gender, race, and age identities in the work. These themes create the backbone of the work, and thus the backbone of CFYS’s learning.

Cultural Context as a Framework for Youth-Led Social Change

Cultural context emerged as an overarching framework for the Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change (CFYS) and has functioned as a foundation from which other key themes have arisen. “Cultural context” reaches beyond an appreciation of diversity to a fundamental change in organizational culture and program design.

Earlier work demonstrated that to effectively engage young women required bringing together youth development with youth organizing strategies. CFYS took this to the next level by exploring ways to ensure that all young people—not only those who already have the personal and community resources to act—had the opportunity to shape the world. This work was unique as it recognized that to truly engage young people requires understanding how they identify themselves, the strengths (and limitations) of the organizational model, and the context of the community that these youth live. Brought together, these became powerful motivators for change and also shaped



the kinds of programs and social change work that each organization undertook.

There are three major identities that shape youth-led social change work:

- The **individual** – the youth and staff in the organization and program;
- The **organization** and youth program; and
- The **community** in which the work is based.

Individual Identity: Individual characteristics—age, class, and gender—are what we most often think of as identity. But, what has become clear is that individual identity is fluid. Identity is influenced by how youth and staff see themselves and how youth and staff see each other, as well as other people and institutions. Their identity is reflected in the words they use, their patterns of interaction, and their own sense of what is important.

Exploring, challenging, and defining identity is core to any youth program as the participants are at an age when they are discovering who they are in relation to the rest of the world. Rather than serving as a backdrop, CFYS grantees consciously integrated these explorations into their programs and social change approaches. Integrating the exploration of what it means to be female, Latina, first generation, etc., into the fundamental design of the program helped shape the distinctiveness of the work. Even while selecting an identity that was the primary focus of the work, successful youth organizations created a space where multiple identities were understood and engaged. Incorporating multiple identities was a challenge, but critical to successfully engaging youth and staff in social change work.

CFYS programs found that identity is expressed by youth and reflected onto them by others. In their identity strategies, these organizations explored a new paradigm seeking to personalize political work. This paradigm identifies societal

What is Cultural Context?

The different factors that influence youth-led social change work, including: 1) multiple individual identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, age, immigration status, linguistic and spiritual identities; 2) organizational cultures ranging from service to activism; 3) place-based identities such as community, town, and region. Cultural context is how youth and staff, organizations, and communities define themselves and are defined by others. The interplay among these three factors shapes the approach to youth-led social change work. In this way, the personal really is the political.



oppression and works with youth to enhance their critical thinking skills and ability to understand the way things work in a society that is seldom fair – not to discourage or alienate them – but to help them fashion the role they will play in creating change.

Ideas in Action: Individual Identity and Action

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, Oakland, California:

AIWA youth developed a campaign based on research they had conducted in their schools about critical issues for immigrant youth. The students identified language barriers as key in relation to a host of school problems, from the condition of the bathrooms to overcrowding in the lunch rooms. There was no one in the school who was in a position of authority who could speak their language, so they were constantly being denied a voice in issues that affected their lives as students. Acculturation and understanding the dynamics of racism are very real issues for immigrant youth – how do you have a voice when language is such a barrier? As a result, they developed the “I have something to say” campaign to fight for additional bilingual and bicultural faculty in their school.

Organizational Identity: Organizational identity is influenced by the historical developments, activities, and mission of an organization. CFYS programs found that organizational identity affected program practices and was a critical factor in determining issues and approach.

For example, is it a service or activist culture; does it see itself as part of a larger network or is it a stand-alone organization; or is it adult or youth-led? The culture of the organization will determine what social change approaches are possible. Further, organizations that embrace youth leadership found that these youth leaders will question and often reshape the organization’s culture. If the organization was not historically youth-led, moving toward giving youth a greater voice can create tension within the organization. CFYS demonstrated that organizations that value youth contributions must be prepared to move in new directions.

Ideas in Action: Community Identity, Cultural Production, and Social Change

Cynthia Choi, Khmer Girls in Action, Long Beach, California:

KGA Cultural Programming builds on the tradition and legacy of other women of color movements, which recognized the connection between cultural production and power. KGA believes that community empowerment lies, in part, in a community’s ability to control and disseminate their own images and stories that reflect their realities, history, and concerns. Since 1998, KGA has aimed to use the transformative nature of the creative process to facilitate Khmer young women’s examination of the root causes of conditions in their communities and reframe those issues from a grassroots, community perspective. Components of our Cultural Programming are:

- Story Collecting Workshops, in which the Khmer Women’s Press engages Khmer young women to explore, examine, question and gain new perspectives on their lives in the context of current and historical community and social issues. Workshops combine creative disciplines such as creative writing, book arts, and letterpress with social studies disciplines such as oral history and participatory action research.
- Southeast Asian Women’s Video-making Institute trains a new generation of Khmer American women in the art of film- and video-making, with a concentration on documentary-making
- Storytelling Series, which includes publication of writings created in the Khmer Women’s Press workshops and a Literary/Cultural Series to disseminate these stories, targeting local city and county institutions, universities, and community arts organizations. Khmer young women lead the publication and dissemination of their community’s stories.

KGA uses a Khmer feminist perspective to explore topics that have emerged as priorities, such as the effects of recent legislation and criminalization of urban youth of color. KGA is also interested in documenting the recent deportation of Khmers to Cambodia (U.S. - Cambodian Repatriation Agreement) and its impact on the families who will be left behind in the U.S. The impact of language isolation on Khmer parents’ ability to participate in school reform/educational justice work is another issue of critical concern to KGA.

Community Identity: Many youth organizations participating in CFYS identified with and drew inspiration from a specific geographic area or neighborhood. In order to be successful, local social change work must be in tune with local community culture. This is influenced by the historical and current dynamics of a location and people. CFYS found that to truly understand community conditions and identify appropriate responses, the organization must have a deep understanding of the current and evolving community culture. The culture of the community that they are in and trying to engage with shapes how the program and youth participants are viewed, as well as what activities are possible. (For example, the kinds of activities young women participants in a rural community are able to take on are different than those of young women participants for urban, immigrant communities.)

Bringing it Together:
The Interconnection Among Individual,
Organization, and Community Identities

CFYS organizations found that identity—whether it is individual, organizational, or community identity—does not exist in a vacuum. Girls who are by orientation and circumstance children of immigrants from Asia and Southeast Asia may choose to work with an organization focusing on personal rights and control of their reproductive freedoms, a politic that is perceived by their parents as being very Western and disrespectful of traditional values. Balancing the desire for autonomy and personal freedom of choice with the need for connection and identity with family and social networks presents a tremendous challenge both for these girls and for the youth programs that are committed to their emotional and political development.

It was that interconnection among identities which provided the framework for relevant and successful youth development and youth organizing work.

Effective youth development and youth organizing groups explicitly integrated youth and staff, organizational, and community identities into their day-to-day and long-term activities. For example, a youth organization founded to support young women of color trained them for leadership positions within and outside the organization, while at the same time providing a safe space for participants to discuss and address family and community violence. For these organizations and programs, cultural context is the foundation for how they define social change work and what they want to accomplish. It relates to being part of something bigger than the individual, the youth group, and the youth organization – whether that is community, social network, or national movement.

Ideas in Action: Community Identity and Engagement

Sista Il Sista in Brooklyn, New York has been addressing violence against young women of color in the Bushwick community in Brooklyn. In addition to participating in city-wide efforts to address police reform and accountability, they have been exploring mechanisms to shift the community's attitudes toward violence by developing alternative community-based models that are less tied to existing criminal justice institutions. To address violence against women at its roots, Sista Il Sista has developed a spectrum of community engagement tactics, from the creation of "Violence Free Zones," to videos, murals, events, flyers, and t-shirts featuring anti-violence messages.

Focus on Gender, Race, and Age Identities

Individuals, organizations, and communities bring multiple identities to social change work. The challenge for organizations is valuing all identities while focusing on the identities that are most critical to the social change efforts. If organizations do not focus on specific identities, there is danger in diluting depth for the sake of breadth.

In selecting grantee partners, CFYS focused on youth organizations that served youth from low-income communities. Therefore, class is an assumed and important overlay to this discussion of identity. Gender, race/ethnicity and age identities are important individually and have been used by youth development and youth organizing efforts to target and bolster programming. CFYS found that it is crucial to recognize and understand the individual and collective impact of gender, race and age identities on youth-led social change work.

Gender and Identity

Whether the issue is juvenile justice or domestic violence, or racism, sexism and poverty – these are not theoretical issues for the women at the Center. They are their lived experience, and they bring their personal knowledge to their political work in ways that make it even more powerful and real

— Marlene Sanchez,
Center for Youth Women's Development.
Taken from "Personal Transformation and Social Change: Integrating Healing and Ritual into Our Work."

The term gender means different things to different people. For CFYS gender means gender identity and sexual orientation, including male, female, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and gender questioning. This concept of gender also incorporates race and class identities as CFYS has found them to be closely linked in the lives of youth and their allies.

For over 20 years, the Ms. Foundation and its partners have forwarded best practices for girls' programming. This work provided insight into how young women lead, their need for single gender safe spaces, and their relationships with adults and with other young women. To better understand how young women and young men work together, CFYS expanded this work to include mixed gender programs. CFYS wanted to move from gender being a code word for talking about girls and women, to truly understanding what gender means to youth and how this would affect youth programs.

Integrating this broad concept of gender and making a direct link to issues of race and class is relatively new to the practices of youth organizations and programs. To explore this new terrain, CFYS supported three types of low-income youth programs: young women-only programs;



Ideas in Action: Expanding to Multi-Gender Approaches

Michelle Gaines, **The Appalachian Women's Leadership Project in Hamlin, West Virginia**: Gender issues are central to our program work and all our social change work. Males control how and when females can grow and develop in this community. It became clear early on that the work to develop strong young women was directly tied to working with the young men they were in relationships with. For this reason, and as a commitment to fostering a new generation of boys and men to support the girls and women developed by The Girls Resiliency Project Program (GRP), the program made a conscious decision to start a program for boys that would offer the same kinds of opportunities for growth and development offered to girls. Now with the new Boys Resiliency Program there are boys *and* girls in our space and we have declared it safe and equal space for both. In our planning session recently, the boys were being quiet and the girls started teasing them. We called it right away - because all group members should know that it is safe space for them – even if they want to be quiet. If the boys had done it, we would have been all over them. It has to work both ways.

Recently, we went white-water rafting and we made a decision that it was going to be a coed trip with coed rafts. This was new territory for GRP, and right away all the gender stereotypes about who would play what role started popping up. There were assumptions being made about who would do the paddling and who would pitch the tents, as opposed to who would do the cooking and cleaning up – all based on commonly held gender stereotypes. We made it a requirement for going on the trip that everyone participate in a discussion meeting on gender relationships, roles, and stereotypes. First we had the girls and guys meet separately to discuss the issues, and then both groups got to report back. They talked about how males and females change who they are when they're around the opposite sex because of gender roles and stereotypes. As a result of taking a proactive position on these issues, the youth were able to successfully share responsibilities on the rafting trip – with boys and girls getting to explore their full potential and each other's roles.

young women-only programs that were exploring how to engage young men; and programs that were mixed-gender from their inception. These models present unique programming challenges, but many of the experiences and lessons were common across programs. Some examples include:

- Programs that historically have been “girl-only” efforts struggled with how to enable youth to engage with a multi-gendered world. For example, in the “safe space” created by single-gender programs, how do programs help girls take those same skills and navigate a less safe space – a world that may not yet value or understand their developing leadership skills? For programs considering including young men as participants, understanding how to address their unique needs while at the same time creating new norms for gender roles was a challenge.
- Some mixed-gender organizations explored the need to develop separate spaces and opportunities for young men and young women while they continue to work on integrated programs and initiatives. These programs are also grappling with how to explore issues of gender and gender inequity without creating further tension between young females and males.

Based on their explorations of gender, CFYS participants found several issues emerge including:

Gender Identities are Flexible: CFYS programs found that today's youth see gender identity as much more complex and varied than in previous generations. They inhabit a world where gender identity is neither fixed nor captured in the simple frames of “male” or “female”, “straight” or “gay.” Gender identities are constantly being explored and tested, and, thus, are a fairly important aspect of youth development.

Gender is Prominent: CFYS programs found that especially for youth, gender is a very prominent aspect of their day-to-day interactions. They live in a world where families, communities and institutions react strongly to their “gender” with clear signals and roles for girls and boys. Even if organizations did not raise questions of gender identity, cultural practices and discrimination, youth would naturally raise these issues. In addition, cultural gender stereotypes are transmitted to youth at a very young age, and they carry these stereotypes and react to these stereotypes every day. Program must grapple with how to address these gender issues.

Ideas in Action: Expanding to Multi-Gender Approaches

Stacey Kono and Lily Wang, **Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, Oakland, California:** In the past year we've recruited male volunteers as adult allies to the program. They've been involved with the youth in developing an anti-sexism curriculum. Our core leaders have worked with our adult allies (one woman and two men) in this process and it has led to youth intentionally taking on issues of gender in the group. Youth have led workshops on sexism in the community with the adult allies, and have been empowered by the process. Both male and female members are trained to identify when there's a gender imbalance happening in the group – and to work together to develop solutions.

Ideas in Action: Valuing All Identities

Martine Caveral, **Blocks Together, Chicago, Illinois:** We at Blocks Together (BT) are establishing, with the youth, an organizational culture and practice that is supportive of all youth. We do this through exercises, one-on-one dialogue, and group accountability.

I was thinking about the ways that the popular education we do has an effect on the way our members think about identity and their role as allies to other oppressed groups in the movement. As a group, we have done workshops on homophobia and how it relates to youth in the military; dealt with the criminalization of youth and how queer youth are affected differently in that process; talked about how sexism and homophobia affect the lives of young women whether they are queer, questioning, or straight. BT recently conducted a survey of youth about the issue of school discipline. We included questions about sexual identity to acknowledge that this is a factor in the way that youth are criminalized.

In addition to group exercises and accountability, we also work one-on-one with individual youth. Specifically, I'm thinking about a young man who has been involved in Blocks Together for a long time. I was concerned after he made a very homophobic comment before a meeting began. I

remember thinking that he should be trying to be a better ally for his sister, who identifies as queer.

Later we talked in depth about issues facing the LGBTQ community at a popular education session about militarization. We watched a short film, and then had a discussion about how people's experience in the U.S. military is affected by their race, gender, or sexuality. In the film, there is a section about homophobia, and one of the people interviewed was transgender. I noticed that this particular young man was listening to the woman on the screen.

After the film, we talked as a group about the discrimination and abuse that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face in the military. I also talked to this member one-on-one about the workshop. When I asked him if he learned anything new from the meeting, he said that he didn't realize the extent that women and LGBTQ people were discriminated against in the military. About homophobia, he said, "I guess that's what they mean when they say it's 'An Army of One.' They make everybody be exactly the same, and they persecute others who ain't like them." Then he related it to his identity as a black man. I thought that this was a very insightful thing to say, and that the session forced him to think more deeply about this issue.

Gender and Homophobia: Youth today are pushing adults and their organizations to understand gender more broadly in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation, including male, female, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and gender questioning. While youth organizations are finding ways to work with the unique and common needs of young women and young men, incorporating the specific needs of LGBTQ youth, outside of programs that are developed specifically for them, still continues to be a challenge. CFYS youth leaders and program staff worked to create safe spaces where issues of gender, sexuality, and homophobia can be discussed, and LGBTQ youth can be supported.

At BT, we are part of creating a culture of respect, that is not just in word, but also in deed. The exercises and conversations that arise from our work have had an impact on youth, holding each other accountable, and speaking up about what it means to be an ally. For example, youth members were meeting recently about an upcoming public event, and talking about how to create a welcoming environment for all youth. In the course of the discussion, some of them (including the previously mentioned young man) confronted a couple of the other members about a time when they made some queer youth feel unsafe at another event. One of the results of this conversation was an agreement that all youth had the right to feel good and have fun at our events, and words and actions that countered that idea were completely unacceptable.

I realize that for many of the young people, the activities at BT are the first time they are able to understand what it means for LGBTQ people to experience mistreatment and discrimination. However, the fact that they were able to take leadership in the group through taking risks demonstrates their learning and emerging understanding of this struggle and their role in supporting it.

Race and Identity

This process is about building relationships and building accountability based on mutual respect and a desire to do things differently.

— Soyun Park,
One Nation Enlightened. Taken from
“Youth-Led Organizing for Social Change:
A New Vision of Justice.”

Comprehending how race – like gender and age – affects the lives of young people and adults provides the awareness necessary to understand how the world works and how social change happens. For these organizations, studying race is not about fomenting rage and division, but about building understanding and connection across difference. Youth come to understand that the struggle of a young man of color is tied to the struggle of a poor white girl, and to the struggle of a young gay man. It lays the ground work for creating new ways of thinking and imagining a world that seeks fairness for all people, not despite difference, but because of it.

A number of the programs in CFYS encouraged youth to think critically about issues of race, class, and gender by doing exercises that use their experiences to get at the root cause of problems they face. For example, organizations use popular education strategies that seek to dissect, question and re-frame history and current events as told by the dominant culture. Youth participants are encouraged to do research and think critically about a particular event through the lens of their lived experience and the experiences of their family and community.

The youth organization partners of CFYS approached the issue of race and ethnic identity as it relates to the lives, families, and communities of youth in their programs in a number of ways:



Race and Gender: CFYS participants learned that to truly incorporate gender identity in the work, programs also needed to understand and address race. One is incomplete without the other. Some CFYS programs explored the intersect of gender and race, including addressing gender violence and sexual exploitation of young girls of color and the experiences of young mothers of color in juvenile detention. Some CFYS programs explored gender and race issues as they relate to access to educational opportunities for non- and limited-English speaking immigrant youth and economic disenfranchisement for youth who work in minimum wage jobs in which their safety and health are not considerations. By bringing these identities together, programs could utilize a stronger analysis of the issues faced by youth and draw on a deeper personal experience to create change.

Safe Space for Single Race/Ethnic Groups: A number of programs that participated in CFYS are mono-cultural. Programs that are organized for one racial or ethnic group are often developed as a way of creating a safe space in communities where these youth live (e.g., African American girls in Portland); or in cities where there are

small but predominant racial minority groups (e.g., African American girls in Milwaukee); or in communities where immigrant youth are isolated (e.g., Cambodian immigrant girls in Long Beach or Chinese immigrant youth in Oakland). These programs provide space for youth to connect to their heritage and to explore and create expression for their experiences and the experiences of their families; to organize around issues of concern specific to their communities (e.g., deportation of Cambodian refugees 20 years later; or the closing of community schools in Northeast Portland); to fight for equity of language access within an English-only biased educational system (e.g., Chinese students in Oakland); or to instill leadership capacity and skills for activism for low-income African American girls (e.g., media images and community perceptions of low-income girls in Milwaukee).

Ideas in Action: **Identifying Race and Gender Oppression**

Jeanne Garcia, **Young Women's Project, Washington, DC:** At YWP, issues of oppression and separation are addressed through activities that allow youth and adult participants to not only explore the meaning of the words, but also to learn from one another through honest and open discussions. We celebrate how each person self-identifies and find commonalities. There must be components that allow for: 1) individual identification, 2) group identification and differences, and 3) commonalities and celebration.

One example activity combines gender and race discussions. After doing an activity around gender, we usually kick it off with the "color line." Participants are asked to line up in order according to their complexion. Once they do this (with no hints about lightest to darkest, etc), the facilitator will then ask which is the front of the line. Every time, participants point to the lightest as the front of the line. Once they realize this, they are usually quite angry at their internalized oppression. This is an excellent way to begin honest discussions around race, racism, and oppression for same gender or mixed gender groups.

Adversity and Diversity for Multi-Race Groups:

For programs that have organized across cultures, the work to end oppression and discrimination against youth is still grounded in race politics. Youth of color in Boston are organizing against their exploitation in a community which offers low wages and unsafe working conditions. Girls and women of color in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn organized a public action to protect a member who was being stalked and harassed by an older man



in the community. Black, Latino, and Asian youth in Denver have joined forces to develop a youth-driven restorative justice campaign in their community and schools to counter punitive school polices and police harassment of youth of color.

Ideas in Action: Youth, Race, and Exploitation

Celly Torres, **Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Health and Safety, Dorchester, Massachusetts:** The Peer Leaders of Teens Lead @ Work were discussing a new campaign when they heard the mother of a young man telling the story of her son's death. Her son was working in a CVS pharmacy and was killed pursuing a shoplifter. Here was a young man of color who graduated from Boston Latin Academy and then took the job he could find to support himself: not as a policeman or security guard or any other job in which he might have to risk his life, but as a clerk in a CVS. This young man didn't make a decision to take a job that was going to put his life on the line, but as a result of a lack of training or safety policies regarding shoplifters, he followed his supervisor's lead and pursued a shoplifter - who then stabbed him to death.

The peer leaders of MassCOSH were familiar with the dangers youth face in the workplace, and they were moved to action by this story of unnecessary loss. They developed a survey with the boy's mother and joined with the Brazilian Immigrant Center to conduct surveys of staff in pharmacies in-and-around Boston. They conducted 70 surveys (with 65 teen workers and 5 managers) only to learn that 74% of the workers surveyed had received no training on what to do in case of a robbery; 62% were unaware of any policies related to this workplace hazard. And 31% of the youth surveyed sometimes worked without any supervision.

As a result of these findings the Peer Leaders drafted a set of recommendations to inform the development of a city ordinance and safety plan to train and protect all youth workers. To get input on their recommendations and their organizing strategy, they brought together the Teens Lead @ Work advisory committee, including youth, committee leaders, members of Boston City Council, the Department of Health, and a representative of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA). On the anniversary of the young man's death, the Peer Leaders of Teens Lead @ Work, in cooperation with the Brazilian Immigrant Center and the youth's mother, held a Memorial Event and Press Conference, where they presented their findings and recommendations. With the significant attention brought by the event, the peer leaders have held meetings with elected officials and public safety officers to move forward with an ordinance that would protect future youth from facing the same dangers. This exemplifies the ongoing efforts of MassCOSH to use participatory action research to educate youth, adults and the community at large on the hazards faced by youth in the workplace and to support youth-led organizing efforts to advocate for safety standards, training, and support necessary to protect them.

For the “I Have Something to Say” campaign, youth were clear that adults were critical allies and that involving parents would strengthen their power. The shared victory was one of being heard by the “system”.

— Stacy Kono and Lily Wang,
Asian Immigrant Youth Advocates.
Taken from “Intergenerational
Partnerships for Social Change:
Youth-Led Organizing in
Immigrant Communities.”

CFYS provided organizations an opportunity to explore age identity and its impact on building effective adult-youth partnerships. As adults work with youth to make decisions and lead projects and organizations, there has been a not-so-subtle shift from a focus on “youth-led” to a focus on “intergenerational partnerships that work.” CFYS partners understood that the structure of intergenerational partnerships is necessary for effective youth-led social change efforts. New learning emerged regarding the key factors for success.

To create effective, sustainable youth-led efforts, organizations focused on the essential youth and adult partnerships that are necessary to run a successful organization and a successful campaign (and all of the key components that make these happen). CFYS organizations worked on three fronts:

- **Helping Youth Gain and Sustain Power and Leadership:** Youth often inhabit a world where decisions are made *about* them and *for* them with very little input *from* them. CFYS partners found they needed to use an approach that develops the critical thinking, planning, risk-taking, and respect skills necessary for youth to assume power

Ideas in Action: Youth and Organizational Leadership

Sisters in Action for Power in Portland, Oregon has a multi-tiered approach in which participants go through a two-and-a-half year leadership development program. If they graduate, youth are eligible to become paid interns, have greater influence over the direction of the organization and help train the next generation of youth leaders. In addition to this individual development, Sisters in Action of Power works with young people to transform the relationship between those who usually do not hold power (youth) and those that do (principals, police, policymakers, etc.). The organization trains youth to be able to identify these power dynamics, identify the tactics that might best alter these long-standing structures and traditions, and work to make change.

appropriately and effectively. Gaining and sustaining power takes two primary forms—working on leadership development and working to change power structures.

- **Helping Adults Share Power:** Often adults engaged in youth-development or youth-organizing work are comfortable being in decision-making positions. As a result, for some adults and organizations, enabling youth to make real programmatic and organizational decisions is new



territory and they are uncomfortable sharing the decision-making power. CFYS partners realized that unless youth participants are engaged with developing the vision of an organization or its programs they will never fully embrace it as their own and fully commit to its success. Staff willingness and ability to share power was central to effective youth-led social change efforts. In addition, organizational support for these staff and their efforts to support youth decision-making was key.

"In CFYS, organizational leaders have been encouraged to develop leadership from within. The idea that youth should lead is not common. These organizations realized that they must change their structures to meet their goals—and they have."

— Polly Howells, Brooklyn, NY
CFYS Donor Partner

- **Creating the Partnership:** CFYS partners explored the balance of youth and adult roles and developing new partnerships for change. Because each organization's cultural context was different, each needed to find its own balance and approach to youth-adult partnerships. Groups explored the different ways to support all partners—youth, younger staff, older staff—to do the work effectively. For example, an organization that began as a youth-led effort had to rethink its mission, revise its strategic plan, and reprioritize the work in order to retain the skills and brainpower of the original youth-leaders who were aging out of the program, while at the same time continuing to serve the primary youth constituency. Understanding that roles shift and change with the individual personalities of staff and youth, with the specific work at hand, and with the changing culture of the organization can be challenging.

Ideas in Action: Youth-Adult Partnerships

Colleen Fitzgerald, **Pearls for Teen Girls, Milwaukee, Wisconsin:** In November of 2004, four PEARLS employees were invited to present our model of girl-driven goal-setting and evaluation at the national conference of the American Evaluators Association in Atlanta, Georgia. Three adults and one teen facilitator represented PEARLS, along with our evaluator.

Our presentation covered the inherent challenges of developing a unique method of evaluation; the challenges of involving girls and adults in the process of naming and working toward their own goals in a way that is genuine and not dictated; and lessons learned about how we are, and are not, living our mission.

The teen representative described what true youth-adult partnerships meant to her and other girls in PEARLS. She identified characteristics like: willingness to learn, reliability, common goals, honesty, and equality. She took a very courageous next step when she assertively illustrated where, within PEARLS, she thought these traits were and were not being practiced. She respectfully gave examples of where the executive director and the director of programming were not practicing partnership to the extent she felt they needed to.

While painful and challenging, we were able to set aside roles and positions to practice bridging gaps between what we say and do. We believe dynamic organizations, regardless of size, need to be learning how to live their values and beliefs, and put the issues on the table for dialogue – both within and outside of the organization.



Conclusion: New Approaches to Youth-Led Social Change

Youth, programs, organizations and communities are interconnected by cultural characteristics, identities and challenges; and that connection defines the way we build programs, grow youth, organize and make change.

— P. Cattlin Fullwood,
On Time Associates. Taken from
Culture and Context Book II,
“Capacity Building for
Youth-Led Social Change.”

Organizations involved in CFYS explored a combination of youth development, youth organizing, and identity-based work. As their efforts evolved, CFYS grantee partners reported a mounting sense of “charting new territory” in youth-led social change. **They discovered that this work is more than adding youth organizing activities to youth development work, and more than adding a youth development focus to youth organizing work. Because the work is grounded in multiple identities, it is something wholly new, though deeply rooted in both traditions.** This has led to a refining of youth development and youth organizing tactics and the exploration of new approaches to youth-led social change, including ones that:

- Address youth-identified needs
- Link individual development to larger societal issues
- Use the arts and youth popular culture as a means of creative political expression
- Work more deeply and broadly with youth
- Work to change power structures, societal values, and community culture

Using the lens of cultural context led these organizations to try new approaches. Understanding how youth see themselves and how the community sees them shaped the kinds of social action in which they engaged. These efforts provide insight on ways to retool and strengthen existing youth-development and youth-organizing models.

“CFYS grantees have raised the bar for the ways young people can change institutions and the world around them—for one another, for funders, and hopefully the wider fields of philanthropy and youth work.”

— Marci Pelzer, Martin Family Foundation
CFYS Donor Partner

Address Youth-Identified Needs: CFYS organizations know that to ignore the real, day-to-day problems faced by youth is to misunderstand a critical element of trust-building and exchange. Youth have a number of pressing needs—from family concerns to assistance with school work to helping integrate life skills into their lives. As part of building trust with youth, organizations found they must be sensitive to and address these needs. Further, some discovered there is a delicate negotiation concerning needs and participation. Youth, their families, and community members may engage and participate, but need to see how they will directly and concretely benefit from the relationship. If these organizations are not helping youth address their immediate needs, they are not seen as relevant.

Link Individual Development to Larger Societal Issues: CFYS partners learned that individual transformation and the awakening of young people to forms of oppression and their own individual struggles is a core element of successful social movements. These groups found that when they

structured their program around identity work, linking the individual to larger societal issues naturally emerged. Each group has a leadership development approach that works with youth to identify the “isms” (sexism, racism, ageism, classism, etc.) that influence their lives and work toward creating change in their own beliefs and practices, the beliefs and practices of their peers and those of society at large. By having a place to discuss and address the issues they individually confront (race, class, gender, and age discrimination; family concerns; unjust institutions, etc.) youth were able to see that the personal and political are tightly linked. Combining these two—individual experience and larger societal experience—created a deeper and more holistic approach to growth and development.

Use the Arts and Youth Popular Culture as a Means of Creative Political Expression:

Several groups used the arts and popular culture as a core part of their programming. Creative expression was used as a medium to develop critical thinking skills and as part of external social change work. For example, several groups engaged youth in live performances, productions of videos, plays or newspapers, production of a music CD, or other cultural expressions as a way to raise the voices of youth and increase awareness among youth and community members of key issues. CFYS organizations found this to be a powerful way of connecting individual experience with broader issues.

Ideas in Action: Individual Development and Societal Change

Marlene Sanchez, **Center for Young Women's Development, San Francisco, California:** A group of young moms who had previously experienced Juvenile Hall were meeting in one of the critical thinking circles facilitated by the Center. The moms were talking about how they had gotten there and why, and how the “war on drugs” related to their lives and circumstance. This critical thinking circle took on a life of its own when one of the young moms started to talk about how she'd been shackled during a visit with her daughter. The young woman began to cry as she spoke about her daughter asking, “Mommy, are those bracelets?” and how she couldn't hold her baby because her hands were bound.

Another young woman told her story about asking her aunt to take care of her baby while she served her time, only to have the aunt decide to keep the child. Now the mom, who is in juvenile detention, is in the process of losing her parental rights. Story followed story as the young mothers told of their involvement in the system, and the loss of their rights as women and mothers.

Most were there because of drug-related issues, so they figured that the “war on drugs” must be on them – and that they were prisoners of that war, and as such, they had rights. They formed the Young Mothers Organizing Project (YMOP) and drafted a bill of rights to improve the human rights conditions of young incarcerated mothers and their children. They demanded regular health care, the right to see and hold their children, the right to maintain custody of their children while incarcerated, the right to advocacy and education about the system, and the right to be treated with respect and dignity – simple requests really. As one young mother said, “I just want to be able to see my baby and touch her.”

YMOP presented their “Incarcerated Young Mother's Bill of Rights” to Chief Probation Officer Bill Sifferman on July 3, 2005. As a result of the meeting, Sifferman committed to “embracing the bill of rights and incorporating it into my work.” He also committed to an ongoing partnership with the Center to create visitation policies to ensure a family-friendly atmosphere for young women to meet with their children while in detention and to implement peer-led advocacy, as well as prenatal and parenting education, for all young parents in Juvenile Hall.

“This isn't just political education. This is understanding things from your gut and your life, and taking action.”

Ideas in Action: Arts and Popular Culture

Cynthia Choi, **Khmer Girls in Action, Long Beach, California**: “Yellow Lounge Presents...” is a community-based annual event where our members and staff highlight our current programs and social justice campaigns. Every year, KGA members showcase their work from our writing workshops and digital video institute through dramatic readings, spoken word and performance art before a crowd of 300-400 people, mostly comprised of friends and community members. It is also an opportunity for KGA to talk about our work and recruit potential members.

“Yellow Lounge Presents” has become the community event of the year. Last year, we opened up the program and invited artists from the local community and were overwhelmed by the response. Since this is an annual event, we have built our audience over time. Of course, the organization conducts traditional outreach, email broadcasts, and hip-looking postcard invitations - but really it is mostly through word-of-mouth. Family members, friends and KGA allies all come out to support the individual members and KGA as a whole.

Overall, it is a transformative experience for the girls. For many of them, it is being able to share their many layers in a creative and supportive community-based setting. Even though they are terrified at first, they enjoy the opportunity to speak, be heard and to feel like what they say matters. At this past Yellow Lounge event...we were fortunate to have community artists help our members in performing dramatic readings. It was intense and chaotic leading up to the event, but the girls performed their pieces with passion and without flaw.

We have come a long way from the time when parents did not want their daughters to leave the house and participate in our program because they were the primary caretakers of their younger brothers and sisters and did most of the cooking and cleaning. Time and again, the feedback we now receive from parents and friends is about “how amazing and powerful it is to see young Khmer women speaking their truths.” It is really affirming for KGA to know the parents are really impressed and moved to see their daughters “looking confident and proud of who they are.”

Work More Deeply and Broadly with Youth:

Because of the demanding nature of these new approaches to youth-led social change work, many groups found it critical to provide in-depth training and establish deeper engagement with a smaller number of youth. This focus with a smaller number of youth also proved to be successful in mobilizing larger numbers of youth for social change work. Under the leadership of trained peer leaders, a wider group of youth are often engaged in activities such as peer-led trainings, direct action campaigns, door knocking and surveys. While only a few youth may become the core leaders, their work affects wider circles of youth, enabling the organization to reach much larger numbers. Organizations and foundations need to better understand how to track this impact.

Ideas in Action: Individual Development and Societal Change

The Center for Young Women’s Development in San Francisco, California works one-on-one with young women leaving Juvenile Hall to engage them in the fight to improve their own lives and change the system. Because of the stressful lives these young women lead and the critical nature of having them at the forefront of the struggle, CYWD has found it must work slowly and over extended periods of time to develop and implement campaigns. At the same time, their impact on a large number of youth is seen through the trainings they provide in schools and juvenile halls, demand for publications such as their “Know Justice” handbook for youth and families in the juvenile justice system, and their leadership in statewide youth coalitions.

Work to Change Power Structures, Societal Values, and Community Culture: Implementing long-term policy change is often a challenge in any social change work. Many of these organizations realized that they can change laws or policies, but the law or policy could be implemented poorly or overturned in the current or next administration. Further, if the underlying social problems remain

the same, a change in law won't ultimately matter. To address this, in addition to working on changes in laws or policy, CFYS partners explored ways to make more fundamental changes in power structures, societal values, and culture.

Ideas in Action: Unmasking Injustice through Public Engagement

Amara Perez, **Sisters in Action for Power, Portland, Oregon:** "Critical Truth Actions" are organizing tactics we use that are designed to expose the truth about pressing community issues. Young women working in their local communities use Critical Truth Actions to name and unmask injustice and influence people to take action.

Critical Truth Actions (CTA) are concrete events/activities. They are designed to re-frame dominant perceptions and the "packaging" of public policies. Youth plan and carry out these events and activities as part of the work in a campaign. Critical Truth Actions are an organizing strategy much like Direct Action – but with a different objective and audience. They take place in public space, they reveal research findings done by youth, and they are designed to agitate and educate people in the community. When mapping out the steps in a campaign they come after research, but before and during the tactic phase. They can be used on any issue.

One of the most ingenious Critical Truth Actions was called, "Haunted High: The Tricks that Fooled our Public Schools", which took the traditional pieces of Halloween and radicalized them. "This is what we really need to be scared about." was the catch phrase for the festivities. "HH" was part of a larger campaign titled, Support our Schools and Students (SOS), designed to address the negative impacts of No Child Left Behind. The haunted house helped to raise consciousness and bring awareness to the pressures facing students and neighborhood public schools, and the "scary things happening to public education." The fun/educational activities included:

- "Critical Cemetery," which was filled with 12 tombstones illustrating programs that have died – like money for new books, foreign language classes, the arts and music programs. The cemetery is surrounded by a Death Row mural with images of things that are on the block for execution like teachers' unions, faith in public education and well-rounded and inclusive curriculum.
- "Biting for Bucks" is a game in which people must bite into dangling green apples, which represent money for schools, with their hands tied behind their backs – much like the neighborhood schools that are so desperate for support they have to grasp for the impossible.
- "Haunted House" offered a tour led by a tall foreboding character known only as the "Principal" and includes trips to: Madame Peaches, who reveals the future of public schools; into the class of Mrs. Trapped, who prepares her zombie-like students for yet another standardized test as their dusty thinking caps lie moldering on the floor; and into a meeting of the pig-snouted public officials who are cutting up money from the pot of public education dollars.

This event, attended by 120 community members, provides a perfect example of the way that girls can think creatively and radically within their culture and context to develop political events that both engage and educate the community. For years girls have been telling us "you have to make it fun", because that is a critical part of how change happens: keeping our humor to fuel us and our comrades through the complex, and at times, heartbreaking journey of social change.



Recommendations: Tips for Funders and Practitioners

The Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change (CFYS) engaged in a five-year cycle of learning, grantmaking, and collaboration aimed at charting new territory in the youth development and youth organizing fields. What emerged from this effort was a keen awareness of the critical nature of cultural context. For CFYS, cultural context is the identities—individual, organizational, and community—that shape the approaches and activities of youth-development and youth-organizing efforts. Viewed through the lens of cultural context this work comes into sharper focus and leads to new models of social change—ones that fully embrace youth leadership, link individual development to larger societal issues, and work to create and renew structures and values.

- **Program Staff and Participants are Experts.** Youth development and youth organizing efforts are experts in youth work. Because of their real life experiences, they often have deep insight that can help shape the field. Too often, they may not have the time or expertise to share these insights. Donors can help raise up their voices, provide opportunities to help them share their expertise, and learn from their experience. While outside documentation is a common strategy, CFYS looked for ways to enable the grantees themselves to analyze, document and speak about their work. CFYS did this by conducting site visits that explored a learning agenda, and designing annual convenings shaped by grantee partner-identified issues with staff and youth facilitating workshops and other learning activities.
- **Provide Consistent Learning and Networking Opportunities for All Partners.** The value of learning from each other—organization to organization, donor to donor, and organizations and donors

together—can not be underestimated. This is key for strengthening our shared work and for building a field of knowledge. Ongoing learning and networking opportunities help all partners share information, build knowledge and reduce their sense of isolation. For example, CFYS used a combination of annual meetings, site visits, conference calls, face-to-face meetings and e-mail to keep partners informed and connected to each other's work.

- **Create Safe Spaces for Different Constituency Groups to Find Support.** Youth organization staff, executive directors, youth leaders, and funders are some of the different constituency groups that form within a larger national partnership. While it is important that each group learn from each other, it is also important that they have separate spaces in which to discuss common issues and problem solve with their peers. CFYS did this by organizing separate face-to-face meetings for a particular group (i.e. donors or youth program staff), and creating opportunities within national events for youth leaders, donors, and staff to meet separately.
- **Practice What You Preach.** For example, if your learning centers around the importance of youth-led approaches to social change, youth-adult partnerships, and the intersection of gender, race and class issues, then make sure that your internal practices reflect this learning as well. CFYS worked to ensure that donors and grantees took this seriously by asking key questions, including: How do program activities, and staff and youth training approaches that support young women and men in developing their unique strengths and needs? What are the barriers to and successful strategies in supporting

youth leadership at all levels? How has individual, community, and organizational identity shaped your youth program?

○ **Promote Leadership at all Levels.**

Youth-led social change is founded on the principle that youth must be part of creating the solutions to the problems they, their families, and communities face. CFYS did this by supporting organizations that reflected multiple diversities in their work and leadership, asking youth leaders for their input on all key issues, pairing youth and adult facilitators to lead workshops and other learning sessions, and using interactive and multiple learning methods and approaches. Promoting leadership is more than simply ensuring some young women and men are involved in making some decisions. It is about ensuring that young women and men (from the youngest to the oldest youth in the group) have real decision making roles, are engaged in creating and refining the program model, and have support to use their voice.

- **Think Whole.** The individuals and institutions that we work with take a holistic approach that often combines elements and strategies of youth development and youth organizing as well as drawing on other disciplines. Through our RFP process, CFYS reached out to organizations that were combining youth development, youth organizing and gender-based strategies. Explicitly combining these in grant making and organizational planning enables groups to bring to bear the multiple strategies that help engage and empower youth.

- **Acknowledge Cultural Context.** The strategies and approaches organizations take are shaped by their cultural context—the

interaction of the identity of the individual staff and youth participants, the identity of the organization, and the identity of the community. While some strategies and approaches can be transferred from one successful effort to another, it is critical to recognize that they must be passed through the filter of cultural context. The successful incorporation of a youth-led social change approach into a different setting requires understanding both the cultural context in which a strategy was developed and the cultural context of the new and growing effort.

○ **Provide and Support Capacity Building that Offers Long Term and Culturally Relevant Assistance.**

Capacity building does not happen in a vacuum, nor is there a formulaic approach that is going to meet the needs of all programs. Capacity building is a dynamic process that takes a variety of factors into account, including stage of development, the cultural context of the effort, and specific assistance and support needs. CFYS provided capacity building support to our grantee partners in many ways: periodic phone consultations, surveys, trainings at annual convenings, separate capacity building grants, and hiring an expert to provide organization-specific capacity building assistance (by phone and on-site) that was developed in conjunction with organization and youth leaders.

- **Develop Ways to Capture Broader Impact.** Many youth development and youth organizing efforts work with a core group of youth to create real change. This smaller group of youth reaches out to and involves a greater number of youth, though less intensely. To continue to describe the impact of this approach, it is critical to develop ways to document the broader impact of this work.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is an ongoing process of developing and growing a group, program or organization from the inside. It includes leadership development opportunities for participants and staff, planning and evaluation for program and organizational development and growth, developing systems to support program work, and building sustainability through base building, fundraising, and management and development of staff and Board.

Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change

The Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change is a thriving network of funders and local youth-serving organizations that demonstrate the power and possibility of young women and men to actively engage systems to create positive change in their lives and their communities. As a national partnership representing a breadth of diversities including race, class, gender, sexuality, age, immigration status, location, and type of social change, we learn from organizations that promote and support gender and identity-conscious youth leadership and social change agency in local communities and beyond.

Critical Thinking

The ability to think outside the box and to question things that are presented as “just the way it is.” Thinking critically is about reflecting on our personal experiences in relation to oppression in order to understand how change can happen, and to join with others to take action for change.

Cultural Context

The different factors that influence youth-led social change – from multiple individual identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, age, immigration status, linguistic and spiritual identities, to service- and activist-based organizational cultures, to place-based identities such as community, town, and region. Cultural context integrates individual, organizational and community identities, and therefore shapes and influences everything we do and how we do it. In this way the personal really is the political.

Gender and Gender-Consciousness Programming

Gender is defined broadly to encompass gender identity and sexual orientation, including male, female, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and gender questioning. Gender consciousness relates to understanding the connection among issues that affect gender identity, orientation, and expression. It applies to how we relate to male, female, and transgender youth; recognize the impact of homophobia on queer, questioning, and straight youth; and understand gender as it relates to race, culture, language, social status, and other elements that define identity.

Gender-conscious programming could provide separate “safe” spaces for young women and young men, and/or could provide a space where they could work together to identify and challenge gender stereotypes. Gender-conscious organizations and programs can be identified by their promotion and support of a broad understanding of gender issues; the leadership of women and girls; curriculums and training approaches that support young women, young men and staff in developing their unique strengths and needs; and gender-specific or gender-conscious social change work.

Popular Education

A process for learning that puts the experience and knowledge of those we work with at its center, building outward by adding new ideas and analyzing the root causes of the problems we face, in order to arrive at a shared analysis and plan for action.

Social Change

We define social change as working to create changes in the attitudes, thinking and practices of individuals and systems. Involving youth in social change requires a shift from unquestioning acceptance of the way things are to developing an understanding and collective strategy to engage communities and institutions to address injustice at a systemic level. We believe in engaging youth not just as participants in an already established system, but as active change agents with the tools to analyze and effectively engage systems.

Youth Development *(as defined by the Forum for Youth Investment)*

Youth development is the ongoing process in which young people are engaged in building the skills, attitudes, knowledge, and experience that prepare them for the present and future. Youth development should be seen as an ongoing, inevitable process in which all youth are engaged and all youth are invested.

Youth-Led

By youth-led, we mean that youth participants must be able to take leadership on and participate in program planning, design and implementation (e.g., strategic planning, proposal and curriculum development, research and documentation). Programs that support youth-led social change create an environment that fosters leadership, thereby empowering young people to recognize injustice and take action for change.

Youth Organizing *(as defined by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing)*

Youth organizing is an innovative youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities. Youth organizing relies on the power and leadership of youth acting on issues defined by and affecting young people and their communities, and involves them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these efforts. Youth organizing employs activities such as political education and analysis, community research, campaign development, direct action, and membership recruitment.

APPALACHIAN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PROJECT GIRL'S RESILLIENCY PROGRAM

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Founded in 1996, the mission of Appalachian Women's Leadership Project is to promote gender equity in a community, state, and region of the United States where traditional gender stereotypes continue to predominate. The Girls' Resiliency Program develops young women's leadership by providing skills training in areas such as Board leadership development, web site and newsletter creation, and action research techniques. They are currently working on challenging school consolidation in their community.

ASIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN ADVOCATES YOUTH BUILD IMMIGRANT POWER PROJECT

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Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) was founded in 1983 by union organizers, community activists, and immigrant women with the mission to improve the living and working conditions of Asian immigrant workers in low-income communities. The Youth Build Immigrant Power Project develops the leadership and organizing skills of youth through training and internship programs. Youth leaders partner with adults to challenge and change the poor working conditions of immigrant women in their communities. New projects include working to incorporating bilingual education into the schools and developing an internship and training program for youth leaders.

BLOCKS TOGETHER YOUTH COUNCIL

3914 W. North Avenue
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Working on Chicago's Northwest side, the organization addresses the root causes of poverty and inequality and works to ensure that needed resources are invested in the community. Through the Youth Council, youth identify issues of high priority and develop action campaigns to address them. Recent issues include political education, coalition building with other youth-run organizations, and the Zero Tolerance Policies in public schools which has resulted in increased dropout rates and racial profiling.

CENTER FOR YOUNG WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT SISTERS FOR CHANGE PROJECT

1550 Bryant Street, #700
San Francisco, CA 94103
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Founded in 1992, the organization works to support young women from low-income communities who are involved in the juvenile justice system to build healthier lives and communities. The Sisters for Change Project has provided workshops in juvenile hall, given follow-up training and employment advice to young women recently released from the juvenile justice system, and produced a handbook on the rights of incarcerated youth and their families. The Center was recently honored by the Womens Foundation of California, as well as by the Allende Family, who presented them with the Spirit Award. In November 2005, executive director Marlene Sanchez was chosen to be blessed by the Dalai Lama at an event to honor Unsung Heroes of Compassion.

GIRL SCOUTS OF THE MILWAUKEE AREA COMMUNITY ACTION TEAMS

131 South 69th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53214
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Founded in 1912, the organization provides girls and young women from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to develop self-confidence, creativity, values, and a sense of community responsibility. Volunteers from Community Action Teams engage in a comprehensive leadership development program, which includes convening a Girls Summit on community issues, and implementing an action plan to increase access to health information in the Latino community. Current work includes an anti-smoking campaign and implementation of the CARE program to address women's health issues.

KHMER GIRLS IN ACTION

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Long Beach, CA 90804
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Khmer Girls in Action works to build a diverse and powerful base of women and girl leaders to advocate and organize for the well-being of Southeast Asian communities. Through leadership trainings, research, and cultural productions, the organization works with girls to create solutions and take action on issues that impact their lives and community. Current projects include partnerships with young men's organizations to further develop community health projects, and continuing to support the young women in their membership to take leadership roles within the organization.

MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH TEENS LEAD AT WORK

12 Southern Avenue
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Founded in 1976, the organization is a coalition of workers from economically distressed communities and their allies in unions, community groups, colleges, and the legal and medical professions. The Teens Lead at Work project works with immigrant teens and teens of color from low income communities to engage in social change activities related to their rights on the job. The program works with youth to identify workplace issues, discuss concerns, develop organizing strategies, and become worker advocates. Examples of current work include reaching out to more immigrant communities and building even stronger, more diverse youth membership in the organization. Peer Leaders continue to serve on the program's Advisory Committee and on the Board of Directors.

ONE NATION ENLIGHTENED STUDENTS FOR JUSTICE AND STREETS UNITED

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One Nation Enlightened works to unite diverse communities to fight for social, economic, and environmental justice. Developed by two high school students, the Students 4 Justice project trains youth on issue identification, campaign development, public engagement, and mobilization, and systemic changes for racial justice in education. Students for Justice and Streets United work with youth to put an end to unlawful racial profiling by law enforcement. They are currently working on implementing Restorative Justice principles into the Denver public schools.

**PEARLS FOR TEEN GIRLS INC.
PEARLS POWER PROJECT**

2100 North Palmer Street
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Founded in 1993, the organization pioneered a leadership development approach that builds an unwavering belief in each girl's ability to lead, create, and make a difference. The PEARLS Power Project provides opportunities for girls ages 11 to 13 to apply consciousness raising, communication, and leadership skills to change the issues affecting them and the world around them. Current projects include incorporating political education into the Power Project model, and continuing to build strong youth-adult partnerships.

**SISTERS IN ACTION FOR POWER
GIRLS IN ACTION FOR POWER**

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Fax: (503) 331-1287
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Sisters in Action for Power works to develop a base of grassroots leaders that can influence institutions and reshape the dominant culture to promote racial, economic, and gender equity.

The effort works to empower girls of color from low-income communities to take leadership, work intergenerationally for social change, and develop community-driven campaigns to address social and economic injustices. Examples of recent work include community-based research and advocacy transportation, land equity, and the impact of *No Child Left Behind*.

**SISTA II SISTA INC.
SISTAS SQUADS AND THE FREEDOM SCHOOL FOR
YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR**

89 St. Nicholas Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11237
Tel: (718) 366-2450
Fax: (718) 366-7416
Email: paula@sistaisista.org

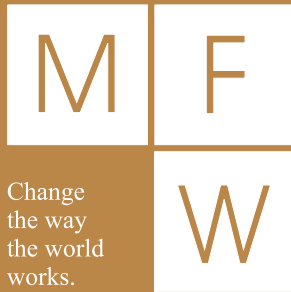
Sista II Sista works to engage young women of color in personal and political development through an exploration of cultural identity, community organizing, and leadership training.

The Sistas Squads and Freedom School help young women develop a gender-conscious approach to self-empowerment through workshops, networking, and community action. They recently developed a Video Squad, which produced a DVD entitled *No More Violence Against My Sistas*.

**THE YOUNG WOMEN'S PROJECT
TEEN-LED PROJECTS**

1328 Florida Avenue, NW Ste. 2000
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: (202) 332-3399
Fax: (202) 332-0066
Email: nadiamoritz@youngwomensproject.org

Founded in 1992, the Young Women's Project is a multicultural organization that supports teen women and girl leaders to improve their own lives and transform their communities. The project trains teen staff and volunteers who educate and train their peers through workshops and issue campaigns. Campaigns on foster care and sexual harassment challenge and seek to improve teen serving institutions through regulation and policy writing, events, public education, membership recruitment, and other strategies. Peer Educator Pilot Program on Sexuality Information (PEPPSI), a new peer training program, was recently developed to provide peer based sexuality education in D.C. public high schools.



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