

2009

Rockefeller Brothers Fund  
Youth Civic Engagement Grantmaking  
Strategic Review  
Condensed Final Report

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# Youth Civic Engagement Grantmaking Strategic Review

## Condensed Final Report

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### Introduction

Americans now know better than ever the power and potential of youth civic engagement. Last November, over 20 million young people aged 18 to 29 helped elect President Obama, the largest number of them to go to the polls since 1972. Clearly, when unleashed and channeled, the power of young people can be a significant political force. But, even in the midst of this excitement, there is real cause for concern. Non-college youth, who make up almost half of America's young adults, were largely absent from the 2008 elections. If these young people continue to live at the margins of our society and political processes, we risk weaker, less cohesive communities. (Figures on youth vote taken from CIRCLE – The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund's (RBF) youth civic engagement grantmaking program works to realize the potential political power of young people, especially those who are disconnected from jobs and educational opportunities. The youth civic engagement portfolio of the Democratic Practice–U.S. program supports organizing led by low-income youth and youth of color because their engagement and empowerment is key for a healthy American democracy. Youth organizing is used here to describe projects and programs that respect the experience and expertise of young people. In this work, youth identify their own concerns, mobilize their peers, brainstorm ideas, and execute campaigns.

Success for the youth civic engagement program will be the emergence of a robust infrastructure for sustained civic engagement of low-income youth and youth of color, growing them from organizers in their local communities to positions of power within the progressive movement and the nation at large. Developing a strong progressive youth leadership movement requires training and networking opportunities, strategic partnerships, collaborative organizing, convening, and safe spaces within which groups of young people can grow and develop. The RBF hopes to be a catalyst with its limited resources, supporting innovative, nimble organizations whose focus is on building the leadership of low-income youth and youth of color.

In July 2008, a strategic review of the RBF's youth civic engagement grantmaking was undertaken in partnership with Mosaica: the Center for Nonprofit Development and Pluralism. Mosaica's consultants reviewed program documents and conducted in-depth conversations with grantees, youth civic engagement funders, and other stakeholders to

determine the strengths and weaknesses of the RBF's grantmaking in this area, identify the field's key needs, and make recommendations for future directions in the program's development. The Fund plans to continue its strategy of building capacity among intermediary organizations that help train, network, and empower low-income youth and youth of color involved in social change work. In the coming years, the Fund will partner with other foundations and its grant partners to implement some of the recommendations outlined later on in the report.

## Background

### Overview of Youth Civic Engagement Grantmaking Strategy (2004 – 2008)

In 2004, the Fund made its first grants designated explicitly to youth civic engagement through the Democratic Practice-U.S. program. The goal was to “expand opportunities for marginalized youth to engage in and maximize the effectiveness of youth organizing and new youth political institutions as a means for developing political power at all levels of government and for delivering policies that better provide for healthy development of young citizens.”

The program grew out of a series of grants made in the late 1990s under the Fund's Pivotal Place: New York City program to local youth organizing groups, including the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, and the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition's Sistas and Brothas United. These early grants demonstrated the difference that young people, empowered with knowledge and skills, can make in their communities.

With this initial positive grantmaking experience, the Fund then sought to develop a structured and strategic approach to supporting the youth civic engagement field nationally. Through consultation with funders and practitioners, staff carried out a scan of the national youth civic engagement landscape to better understand the scope and stage of development of theory, funding, and practice.

### Why Youth Civic Engagement?

Youth civic engagement is a broad term that encompasses a spectrum of ways in which young people can be involved in the civic life of their communities. It includes service and volunteerism, youth leadership development,

“The only way there is really going to be change in America is with young people participating in the process ... and young people become leaders through the process of fighting for what they believe in.”

– Biko Baker, executive director,  
League of Young Voters

youth organizing, arts/culture/media organizing, and participation in electoral politics (voter registration and education, voting, working on campaigns and running for office).

For funders who care about the strength, quality, and practice of democracy and reversing the undemocratic forces of racial and economic inequality, money in politics, media consolidation, limited access to higher education, and other systemic issues—investing in the civic engagement of young people is critical. With more than a third of the country’s population under the age of 25 (see the table below), democratic solutions to the country’s most pressing problems can only be found with the active involvement of young people. Low-income youth and young people of color are disproportionately affected by these critical issues.

<b>Key Demographic Trends – Youth Population in the United States</b>	
<b>Percent of the U.S. population under the age of 25</b>	34.6%
<b>Percent of 18-24 year olds who are White</b> (This compares to 88% in 1992.)	62%
<b>Percentage of 18-24 year olds who have attended some college</b>	
African American	40.4%
Latino (Hispanic)	30.3%
White	49.5%
<b>Percent of 16-19 year olds who are “disconnected”</b> (Out of school and out of work)	
African American and Latino (Latino)	12%
White	6%
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March Supplements, 1968-2006, as cited in report by The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), November 2006. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2006 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2007.  Charles Dervarics, “Minorities Overrepresented Among America’s ‘Disconnected’ Youth” (Population Reference Bureau, August 2004)  Mark Hugo Lopez and Karlo Barrios Marcelo, “Youth Demographics” (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, November 2006)	

If the best solutions to problems are found by those most deeply affected by them, then low-income youth and young people of color must have a place at the civic table, locally and nationally. Yet, many youth civic engagement efforts focus on college campuses and/or community service strategies, thus leaving low-income youth—who cannot afford to go to college and have less time to volunteer—with fewer opportunities to engage. At the same time, many of the programs targeted to low-income young people of color approach the young people as problems to be fixed, rather than as resources to be tapped. A youth civic engagement strategy that creates space for low-income, young people of color to be powerful can transform views of these young people from problems into valuable contributors—itself a necessary condition for participatory democracy.

## RBF's Current Youth Civic Engagement Strategy

The Fund's current grantmaking strategy has been focused on low-income youth of color, including both non-college youth as well as young people in college. This focus grew out of the recognition that low-income youth of color are one of the most politically and economically marginalized demographic groups, that they are disproportionately affected by misguided public policies, and that they have great potential to create solutions.

The Fund's grantmaking has also emphasized the following strategies:

- **Support for intermediaries.** Intermediaries support the field by offering training, developing leadership, providing capacity-building assistance, organizing convenings, and developing collective vision and strategy. Some also carry out regranting. Effective intermediaries are the connective tissue for progressive movements.
- **Funding of joint proposals, collaborations, and convenings.** Recognizing that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” the Fund has encouraged networking and collaboration by funding joint proposals and convenings. Such efforts help create the “connective tissue” for the field. The Fund has aimed to have each grant not only achieve its own goals but also contribute to the collective impact of a group of grants.
- **Multi-year, general support.** It takes years to build the infrastructure to support youth civic engagement, and ultimately to see the impact of that work in the form of youth-led community and policy change. Understanding the need for long-term investments, the Fund has committed to multi-year support.

**Priority on youth organizing form of youth civic engagement.** LISTEN, an intermediary that dissolved several years ago after making an indelible mark on the field, put forth this definition of youth organizing: “Youth organizing is a 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. Young people themselves define the issues and youth organizing groups support them as they design, implement, and evaluate their own change efforts.” Guided by this basic concept, the Fund was a founding member of the Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing, which supported a series of papers that helped define the youth organizing field and continues to play a leadership role in strengthening the field.

## Overview of Strategic Review

In the summer of 2008, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund contracted with Mosaica: The Center for Nonprofit Development and Pluralism to conduct a strategic review of its youth civic engagement program. In particular, the Fund sought to address questions such as the following:

- What difference has the Fund’s grant program made for the grantees and for the field?
- How can the Fund strategically invest its funds to have the greatest impact? How can it invest strategically in under-resourced regions like the South and Southwest?
- Should the Fund consider collaborative grantmaking with other RBF programs in specific issue areas (such as environmental justice)?
- How else should the Fund work to expand philanthropic support and otherwise strengthen the field? How can it best support the infrastructure of the field?
- What are the major accomplishments of the Fund’s grantee partners?
- What measures of progress and impact would best track the work of the grantmaking and grantee partners?
- Should the Fund commission or support research about the long-term impacts on young people of participating in the kinds of programs supported?

Mosaica carried out this review over a five-month period, from August 2008 through December 2008. The review entailed the following:

- Review of key internal documents (grantee proposals and reports, background memos and Board materials) and outside materials (such as Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing reports)
- Interviews with five staff members of the Fund
- Online survey of and site visits with all 10 core grantees—interviewing a total of 47 staff, constituents, and board members
- Interviews with 17 stakeholders providing expertise and broader perspectives on the field

Characteristics of Core Grantees Interviewed	
<b>Years of Experience</b>	Two years to 75-plus years
<b>Annual Budget (Organization)</b>	\$215,000 to \$14 million
<b>Staff Size</b>	Two to 74
<b>Geographic Focus</b>	National with some focus on Bay Area, South, and targeted states
<b>Issues</b>	Public education reform, juvenile justice, environmental justice, immigration reform, reproductive rights, economic justice
<b>Approach to youth civic engagement</b>	Youth organizing, youth leadership development, and electoral work
<b>Strategies</b>	Training, organization capacity building, paid internships/fellowships, mentoring, convenings, alliance and network building, media coverage, research, regranteeing to local youth organizing groups

## Youth Engagement Continuum

This chart presents one framework for understanding the spectrum of activities and programs to help and empower young people that has been used by the youth organizing field.

Intervention	Development	Systematic Change	Collective Empowerment	
Youth Services	Youth Development	Youth Leadership	Youth Civic Engagement	Youth Organizing
<p>Defines young people as clients</p> <p>Provides services to address individual problems and pathologies of young people</p> <p>Programming centered around treatment and prevention</p>	<p>Provides services and support, access to caring adults and safe spaces</p> <p>Provides opportunities for personal growth and development</p> <p>Meets young people where they are</p> <p>Builds young people's individual capacity</p> <p>Provides age-appropriate support</p> <p>Emphasizes positive self identity</p> <p>Supports youth-adult Partnerships</p>	<p>Includes components of youth development approach plus:</p> <p>Builds authentic youth leadership opportunities within programming and organization</p> <p>Helps young people deepen historical and cultural understanding of their experiences and community issues</p> <p>Builds skills and capacities of young people to be decision makers and problem solvers</p> <p>Youth participate in community projects</p>	<p>Includes components of youth development and youth leadership plus:</p> <p>Engages young people in political education and awareness</p> <p>Builds skills and capacity to do power analysis and action around issues they identify</p> <p>Begins to build collective identity of young people as social change agents</p> <p>Engages young people in advocacy and negotiation</p>	<p>Includes components of youth development, youth leadership and civic engagement plus:</p> <p>Builds a membership base</p> <p>Involves youth as part of core staff and governing body</p> <p>Engages in direct action and political mobilizing</p> <p>Engages in alliances and coalitions</p>

*Youth Engagement Continuum originally developed by Listen, Inc. and adapted by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing.*



## Summary of Overall Findings

*Key Findings:* The review found a shared sense that the state of youth civic engagement is stronger than it has been in several decades, and a shared excitement about the future. There is also agreement that youth organizing has “come a long way,” but that this particular approach to youth civic engagement has “not yet been able to fulfill its promise.” Yet they also expressed deep concern that the economic crisis threatens the opportunities young people may have to realize their leadership potential. As funders face limited resources, people are especially concerned that support for youth—and especially for strategies such as youth organizing, considered more ‘risky’—will be the first cut.

*Important Findings and Questions for the Fund:* The findings of this review reaffirmed the value of the Fund’s grantmaking strategy, including its focus on low-income youth of color and its support for intermediaries. As one stakeholder noted, “This is the most diverse generation in history and we need to make sure that future progressive leadership reflects this diversity.” Grantees in particular have found that the Fund’s support has provided seed money for new efforts, lent credibility to those efforts, and allowed grantee organizations to leverage new support from other funders. The review also raises important questions:

“It’s just making sure that people of color have a voice and a place at the table; because one of the things I’m starting to see is that the leadership – they care, but they don’t have the same experience as people they’re advocating for. If you haven’t lived it, you can’t have the same impact.”

– Young People For Fellow

- How should the Fund respond to key gaps and opportunities – invest in geographic regions, specific communities, or organizational infrastructure?
- How can the Fund best leverage its credibility to educate and encourage other funders to support youth civic engagement and particularly youth organizing?

*Important Questions for the Field:* The review raises important questions for the field, including the following:

- **Current threats and opportunities.** How can youth civic engagement organizations work together and with the funding community to strategize on ways to sustain their work through the tough economic times? How can they collectively position themselves to effectively influence the policy agenda of the new administration, and especially “win” new federal funding streams for their work, and most especially for organizing strategies?
- **Innovative practice/deepening impact.** Over the long term, what practices will help youth civic engagement organizations deepen their impact? What are the most innovative practices, such as intergenerational organizing and power-

sharing, that will break new ground and hold out promise for resolving longstanding challenges?

- **Benchmarks.** What are the best indicators of the collective impact of the grants on the youth civic engagement field? Is it a matter of combining the numbers of young people reached or engaged by each grantee? What are the most meaningful benchmarks for young’s people’s individual and collective development and civic engagement, organizational capacity, the infrastructure for the field, and movement on progressive issues and policies?
- **Funding strategy.** How can funders work together, coordinating their funding strategies, to respond to key gaps and opportunities? How can those funders who value and support youth organizing in particular educate and encourage other funders to support this strategy?

### The State of the Field and Considerations

Grantees and stakeholders agreed that, overall, the state of the youth civic engagement field is much stronger, more sophisticated, and more strategic compared to 10 years ago. They attributed this to a combination of factors, including changed attitudes, funder investments, and a sense of urgency about the need to get involved.

Youth civic engagement is also more visible than it has been in decades, thanks in large part to the significant role young people played in the last two national elections, and especially in President Obama’s campaign.

“Youth civic engagement groups have done an excellent job of innovating and holding themselves accountable to goals, being creative about challenges that have faced this sector for the last decade and collaborating when appropriate.”

– *Generational Alliance Staff*

That said, they also agreed that the field is “fractured.” Rather than a single, unified youth civic engagement field, there are several distinct “worlds,” including campus-based activism around specific issues, electoral/voter-focused work, social justice organizing/movement-building at the regional and national levels, and grassroots organizing around community issues that may or may not be connected to regional and national efforts. In addition, the infrastructure to support and sustain youth civic engagement tends to be inadequate and inconsistent, with a need for more resources, stronger intermediaries, a stronger leadership pipeline, and better benchmarking.

For the near future, the challenge facing youth civic engagement organizations is not finding the resources to grow their programs to scale, but simply sustaining what they’ve been doing as resources shrink. Grantees identified an urgent need to come together and strategize with funders on two fronts: (1) how to deal with the increasingly critical funding situation facing the entire sector, and (2) how to position youth civic engagement organizations to influence, shape and then be part of a new national agenda. They also noted that it is even more important to convene and otherwise connect among themselves and collaborate in their work.

Below is a brief description of the key trends highlighted by grantees and stakeholders during our interviews and/or visits with them in the fall.

- **Increased civic engagement among all youth.** The new millennium has seen the greatest participation of young people in civic life since the 1970s. The increase in participation has taken place across the youth civic engagement spectrum—from community service to voting to organizing for social justice—and has seen young people creating change at the local, state, and national levels. They are playing pivotal roles in social justice movements—especially the immigrant rights and environmental justice movements, as well as those focused on the conditions of young people, such as education and juvenile justice. Stakeholders attributed this increase to a combination of factors, including the following:
  - *Changed attitudes toward engagement among young people.* Several stakeholders involved in research noted that the increase in engagement is in part driven by different attitudes among young people today. They are “receptive to being engaged and will be the ones to take the country in a different direction and repair damage that has been done to the public spirit of the country.”
  - *A sense of urgency about the need to get involved, in response to both threats and opportunities in the environment,* that are both motivating young people to get involved and making their engagement even more critical.
  - *Funder investment in youth-led organizations and civic engagement efforts.* Increased funder investments over the past 10 years have helped build a new cadre of young leaders, innovative civic engagement practices, and an increase in the number of youth-led organizations. (According to the Future5000.com database, there are more than 600 youth-led or youth-driven organizations in the country today.)
- **Increased visibility of youth civic engagement and value of youth role.** Youth civic engagement gained visibility in 2008—thanks in large part to the significant role young people have played in recent election cycles. As one stakeholder noted, the role of young people in the campaign was not “just about the numbers, but also the tactics they brought and range of technologies they used, which completely changed the dynamic.”
- **Continued dominance of campus-based and service-focused opportunities.** Much of the growth in opportunities for engagement has taken place in the community service field and on college campuses (including both service and other, more politically active forms of engagement). Many well-established national groups that promote or rely on youth civic engagement concentrate their effort on campuses. This tendency is problematic, given that a relatively small percentage of young people attend and graduate from college. It also means that these efforts tend to “give voice and visibility to middle-class student issues, such as the environment,

college affordability, and Darfur.” Meanwhile, issues that disproportionately impact low-income youth—such as the quality of K-12 education and juvenile justice issues—are not getting sufficient funding or visibility.

- **Growth of innovative strategies and practices within youth organizing and other forms of youth civic engagement.** Grantees and stakeholders observed that over the past 10 years, the field has developed what are now “well-tested, proven and effective” strategies and practices, including creative use of arts and culture and models that blend youth development and youth leadership. They highlighted the following strategies and practices as particularly worthy of attention and support:
  - *Intergenerational work.* A growing number of both adult-led and youth-led organizations doing more intentional work across generations. In some instances, adult-led groups are reaching out to youth and forming their own youth-organizing groups or youth-inclusion practices. In others, traditionally youth-led organizations are adopting intergenerational models, bringing adults into their work.
  - *Organizing that connects issues.* Increasingly, organizing efforts are connecting education reform and juvenile justice to larger social and economic issues. There is a growing movement-building ethic and understanding of the intersections between different issues and cross-sector solutions.
  - *Innovative use of technology.* Technology plays a critical role in youth civic engagement, with an emphasis on “the best ways to engage people using technology, not technology for technology’s sake.” The field needs a better understanding of how young people are using technology, especially the importance of on-line peer-to-peer platforms (e.g., Facebook, socialactions.org) to connect to other young people and to issues.
- **Recognizing and attending to youth development needs.** The youth organizing field in particular is realizing that, as organizations support the development of young people as leaders, they also need to pay attention to other needs, including those that may best be met through social services.
- **Inadequate infrastructure and resources.** While the field has experienced growth and innovation, the infrastructure at the national level is seen to be inconsistent and inadequate to support further growth. Further, the field is “siloed and segregated” by target populations (e.g., high school vs. college vs. non-college), approaches (e.g., organizing vs. electoral focus), and by issue. As discussed further below, grantees and stakeholders identified the need for a stronger leadership pipeline, a stronger networker of intermediaries, better coordination and collaboration, and increased resources to “take efforts to scale.”
- **Measuring impact.** Grantees struggle with how best to measure the impact of their work—on young people, the field, and social justice movements—and recognize the

inherent challenges with results-oriented measurement given the nature of their work. One of the challenges of benchmarking for the youth civic engagement and youth organizing fields is balancing both quantitative and qualitative measures for success that define common indicators of youth leadership while respecting personal transformation. Another is capturing the “downstream” impact of work by intermediary organizations.

## **The Impact of the Fund’s Youth Civic Engagement Grantmaking**

The review found that the grantees’ work has had an impact at four distinct levels: 1) increasing young people’s development and civic engagement, 2) strengthening individual organizational capacity, 3) building the infrastructure of the field, and 4) moving progressive issues and policies. While the grantees can demonstrate impact at all four levels, they all believe that that they can have both a deeper and wider impact, and all face challenges measuring their impact.

### **Young People’s Development and Civic Engagement.**

Grantees agree that the most important measure of the impact of their work is sustained engagement of young people over time in progressive organizing and social justice movement building. Further, they intend that young people develop the knowledge, skills, confidence, and relationships to play a leadership role in organizations, communities, and the movement. A few illustrative figures compiled from grantee reports, interviews, and website communications include:

- Over 4,000 young people have been exposed to community and electoral organizing through grantees’ training efforts. Over 600 young people were placed in paid internships/fellowships.
- Over 14,000 young people were exposed to social justice issues through WireTap’s online youth civic engagement information resource.
- Three young people ran for office and one young person won and is a State Delegate in South Dakota.

The numbers above fail to capture the full impact of the grantees’ work for several reasons. Typically, grantees lack the resources and capacity to adequately track program participants over time, once they leave their program or after they attend a training. In addition, there are issues such as the need for clear benchmarks and a hesitancy for intermediaries to claim “downstream” impact.

SOUL [School of Unity and Liberation] introduced me to organizing and gave me a vision... they placed me with a community organization and I jumped in doing door knocking on a campaign for immigrant women workers' rights. SOUL taught me how to do the outreach and speak to people. It opened my eyes to the power I have. Now I have the confidence to fight."

– A SOUL Alumna

### **Individual Organizational Capacity**

Grantees recognize the need to build strong and sustainable organizations. With support from the Fund, grantees have been able to strengthen their organizations in the following ways:

- **Created new initiatives.** The Fund provided the seed money to start up two new youth civic engagement initiatives – The Center for Community Change's Generation Change program and the Generational Alliance (GA), a membership organization. In fact, the GA was conceived by three RBF grantees – Movement Strategy Center, League of Young Voters, and Young People For – who came together to form the alliance and obtained seed money from the Fund.
- **Increased the number of paid staff.** With the Fund's support, two grantees hired their first paid staff, which allowed them to establish stable programs.
- **Strengthened organizational capacity in key areas.** At least one grantee was able to use RBF funds to work with a consultant to create new management systems.
- **Leveraged support from other funders.** At least one grantee's budget tripled as a result of being able to leverage the Fund's support.

### **Infrastructure of the Youth Civic Engagement Field**

Beyond ensuring that their own organizations are strong and sustainable, grantees understand the value of building the infrastructure of the field. When they talk about their work, they talk about wanting to build structures, systems, practices and relationships that "leave something" behind. Grantees are contributing in different ways to strengthening the infrastructure of the field. Through its support of these grantees, the Fund's grantmaking has contributed to:

- **Ongoing development of intermediary infrastructure.**
- **Stronger base for youth organizing as a field.** While the youth organizing field faces its own gaps and challenges, the RBF support has contributed to the continued development of new youth organizing efforts, models, and practices.
- **Creation of new tools for the field.** The Fund's grantees have produced many new tools for the field, such as training manuals, curriculum, and web sites with youth civic engagement information.

- **New networks and collaborations.** There are numerous examples of collaboration among RBF grantees and with other allies in the youth civic engagement field. Organizations are collaborating to: develop joint strategy to move issues, design shared curriculum, conduct joint outreach and recruitment, and offer trainings jointly.
- **A base of research.** The Fund has supported the Research Collaborative on Youth Activism, based at the Cesar Chavez Institute for Public Policy at San Francisco State University. This effort brings together a cohort of researchers partnering with “on the ground” youth organizing efforts to document their work and answer questions such as: how do race, gender, and identity affect how young people of color engage? What are their pathways to getting involved? What factors in schools and communities help or hinder their involvement?

### Progressive Issues and Policies

The work of the Fund’s grantees contributes to advancing progressive issues at the local, state, regional and national levels in a variety of ways. With support from the Fund, grantees have had an impact on progressive issues and policies in ways that include the following:

- Created a youth policy platform, national voter-engagement project, and post-election strategy
- Supported youth-led policy and practice change. (Through their training programs, fellowships, and re-granting, RBF grantees are supporting young people in bringing about concrete changes in their communities.)
- Organized voter registration/turnout
- Encouraged electoral participation
- Facilitated youth voice at progressive tables and participation in progressive meetings
- Garnered positive media exposure of youth contributions to organizing

### Reflections from the Field: Grantee and Stakeholder Perspectives

**Grantee Perspectives:** Overall, grantees had positive reports about their experiences with RBF as a grantmaker. They especially value and would like to see RBF continue the following:

- *Commitment to the civic engagement of low-income youth of color.* As one grantee observed, “This is not something a lot of other funders are committed to.” Grantees would of course love to see the RBF be able to



provide “larger and longer-term” investments in this program. As one said, “They get it, now if only they had more money to help support the field.” The Fund, and the Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing, were frequently acknowledged for their role in “kick-starting youth organizing as a national movement” and “allowing people space to focus on being a leader in the youth organizing field.”

- *Investment in intermediaries.* The notion of building infrastructure for a field—and the critical role intermediaries play in doing that—is also something not all funders understand. Grantees would like to see the RBF continue its investment in this area, perhaps investing in a scan of intermediaries to determine what’s most needed (e.g., geographic coverage? more re-granting programs?)
- *Multi-year and general operating support,* which has been important as seed money, a “vote of confidence,” and a source of credibility to encourage other funders to support their work. As one grantee noted, “The flexibility of the RBF funds allows us to do so many things we could not have done otherwise. The RBF has been a significant ‘connector’ for us, bringing us together with others, encouraging deep partnerships.”
- *Genuine interest in their work.* Grantees have appreciated the level of engagement of RBF staff in their work. “They are active in the field—they learn about what groups are doing and share that learning with other funders.”
- *Flexibility, responsiveness, and professionalism.* Grantees have found the RBF very easy to work with and supportive as a funder. They welcome the site visits from program staff and appreciate low-maintenance reporting process.
- *“Beyond the Money” Support.* Grantees have particularly appreciated the Fund’s role in advocating with other funders to increase support for youth civic engagement and youth organizing in particular. They would welcome stepped up involvement in educating others in the foundation world, for example by funding a series of case studies. They would also welcome the Fund taking a lead role in organizing convenings, such as convening a southern youth strategy session to enable southern youth groups to share ideas and strategies and strengthen the networks among them.

Overall, grantees acknowledge broad scope of needs for the field—and the broad agenda for funders identified through this review—and agree on the need for RBF to focus its resources on a few key priorities.

**Stakeholder Perspectives:** Stakeholders familiar with the RBF’s grantmaking applauded the Fund for its leadership and advocacy for the youth organizing field in particular. They pointed to its “beyond the money” contributions and also felt that the RBF’s funding has been “solid and realistic in terms of what \$1 million can do.” Several also pointed to the “good cross section” of groups funded. Stakeholders offered the following suggestions for RBF:



- *Keep focus on target population.* The RBF's focus on low-income, youth of color, especially those not on the traditional college track, is an important niche for the RBF.
- *Continue support of intermediaries.* Several stakeholders commented that what the RBF has done very well with its limited resources is to fund intermediaries. As one noted, "General Alliance is an amazing alliance, an amazing coalition of youth civic engagement groups that are really doing collaboration. It's an example of where foundations can be solid allies beyond the money."
- *Continue support across issues and regions.* Stakeholders generally agreed that it would not make sense for the RBF to focus its funding on an issue, though "there are issues that RBF could contribute to." However, they had mixed perspectives on whether or not it makes sense to focus on a region. One funder commented, "It would be hard with \$1 million for RBF to leverage one region." Another commented that "I would be concerned about a funder as big as RBF shifting to a geographic focus or withdrawing funding from a community where it's currently invested."
- *Use the RBF's presence and reputation in the bigger youth civic engagement field to leverage and magnify youth organizing.* Numerous stakeholders see an important role for the RBF in continuing to advocate with other funders, perhaps also funding research around how to best frame messages about youth organizing that will resonate with funders. Several stakeholders would like to see youth civic engagement have more visibility and support within the RBF. "The value of this approach could be heightened if the staff advocates for it in its other areas of funding. Even if it cannot put more money into the youth civic engagement portfolio, at least they get a boost by others also having a strong voice for it."
- *Consider potential for leverage:* One way to measure success is if the RBF invests in institutions that are then able to leverage support from other stable funding partners.

## **Mosaica Recommendations for Future RBF Youth Civic Engagement Grantmaking**

Based on our interviews, we make the following recommendations, recognizing that the RBF board and staff will implement them in alignment with the Fund's resources, priorities, and the changing needs of the field.

### **1. Continue to Invest in Intermediaries**

Rationale: Intermediaries play a key role in addressing gaps and have a multiplier effect

Potential Strategies:

- Support capacity-building needs of existing intermediaries
- Invest in an intermediary for a geographic area that lacks access to strong regionally-based support (This could be strengthening an existing group to serve in that role, or it could mean supporting the formation of a new organization or alliance.)

### **2. Support Collective Organizational Capacity-Building Strategies**

Rationale:

- The work of grantees and their partners could be much stronger with an increase in resources to address organizational development
- Groups will not be able to sustain growth without strengthening internal infrastructure

Potential Strategies:

- Fund shared technical assistance providers or coaches for OD support
- Fund shared human resources/fiscal management functions
- Fund professional development for staff

### **3. Invest in Shared Infrastructure for Alumni Support**

Rationale:

- Grantees lack time/resources to develop own infrastructure to build strong alumni base
- Shared infrastructure will support cross-organization linkages

Potential Strategies:

- Shared alumni coordinator housed at one organization
- Shared job bank, online forum, mentoring networks, peer support for developing alumni engagement strategies

- Support to send young leaders and alumni to convenings, conferences, trainings (e.g., Rockwood Leadership Institute) and other professional development opportunities
- A national conference of alumni
- Invest in building shared infrastructure for alumnae engagement and support for ongoing leadership development and movement building

#### **4. Invest in National and Regional Convenings**

Rationale:

- Convenings are critical to movement building – creating shared vision, joint strategy, and coordinated action
- Organizing and participating in more convenings – both staff and program participants/constituents – will strengthen progressive movements

Potential Strategies:

- Fund groups to organize convenings
- Provide support to grantee staff and constituents to participate in convenings
- Partner with other funders to support convenings
- Invest in national and regional convenings across issues/constituencies/geographic regions

#### **5. Explore Building Infrastructure in Selected Regions and Communities**

Rationale:

- Gaps and opportunities vary by region, a prime example being the South
- Gaps and opportunities also vary by specific culturally based communities, a prime example being Native Americans

Potential Strategies:

- Increase investment in groups that have strong roots and innovative practices
- Partner with local or national funders
- Support networking and tools for sharing and sharpening strategies
- Explore focusing resources on building infrastructure in selected regions, most importantly the South (and possibly the Southwest and Midwest outside of Chicago), and perhaps by selected ethnic communities, such as Native American communities

## **6. Increase Efforts to Educate and Influence Other Funders**

Rationale:

- Lack of growth in funding pie is a significant barrier to growth of youth organizing field
- The Fund is well-positioned to educate and influence others

Potential Strategies:

- Continue investment in Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing as primary vehicle for developing knowledge base, serving as a model, and disseminating key messages
- Increase the Fund's visibility in funding circles to expand understanding and support for youth organizing

## **7. Allow for Flexibility to Seed New Approaches**

Rationale:

- The Fund is in a strong position to identify and seed innovative organizations and strategies that show promise
- Many exciting projects are happening at local and regional levels (e.g., multi-generational approaches, hip-hop culture, new technology use, participatory action research)

Potential Strategies:

- Consult with grantees and other stakeholders on the priorities for innovation that the Fund will support
- Use two-tiered strategy of investing in existing work and seeding new efforts
- Explore focusing resources on an issue focus

## Conclusion

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund recognizes that supporting the civic engagement of low-income youth and youth of color requires investments of financial, intellectual, and other capital well beyond its own capacity. For that reason, the Fund will focus on implementing a few key recommendations and partnering with other foundations and organizations to carry out others. In the near term, RBF staff will focus on supporting the capacity-building needs of intermediary organizations, and will partner with these intermediary organizations to meet key needs in the field, including the development of an infrastructure for alumni engagement, and of targeted leadership development opportunities in specific regions and communities, including the South, Native American communities, young women, and LGBT youth.

The engagement and empowerment of low-income youth and youth of color is key for a healthy American democracy. Knowing that we cannot support this work alone, the Fund invites other foundations and nonprofit organizations to consider ways to respond to the threats and opportunities outlined in this report. We embrace collaboration as a key strategy to develop and deepen the civic engagement of young people so that they may advance constructive social change through democratic decision making and social movements.

## Appendix

<b>Youth Civic Engagement Stakeholder Interviewees</b> Mosaica for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund September–December 2008	
<b>Core Grantees</b>	
Center for Community Change – staff and fellows Washington, DC	Movement Strategy Center – staff and program participants Oakland, CA
Funders Collaborative for Youth Organizing – staff, board, and grantees New York, NY	San Francisco State University – staff San Francisco, CA
Generational Alliance – staff and member organizations San Francisco, CA	School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL) – staff and program alumni Oakland, CA
Highlander Center – staff and program alumni New Market, TN	Young People For (People for the American Way) – staff and fellows New York, NY
League of Young Voters Education Fund – staff and program participants Milwaukee, WI	WireTap (Tides Center) – staff San Francisco, CA
<b>Funders</b>	
Pam David, Executive Director, Walter and Elise Haas Fund San Francisco, CA	RBF Staff:  Stephen Heintz, President Benjamin R. Shute, Jr., Program Director Naomi Jackson, Program Associate Ben Rodriguez-Cubeñas, Program Director Gail Fuller, Director of Communications
Anna Fink, Senior Program Officer, New World Foundation New York, NY	
Jee Kim, Program Officer, Surdna Foundation New York, NY - Board member, Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing	
Brinda Maira, Program Officer, Merck Family Fund, Milton, MA - Board member, Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing	
Ben Binswanger, Senior Advisor, Case Foundation, Washington, D.C.	
Nat Chioke Williams, Executive Director, Hill-Snowdon Foundation, Washington, D.C. - Board member, Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing	

<b>National YCE Organizations or Experts</b>	
Howard Gardner, Professor, Harvard University (with Carrie James and other colleagues) Boston, MA	Robby Rodriguez, Director, South West Organizing Project Albuquerque, NM
Grant Garrison, former Program Officer, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Los Angeles, CA	Paul Schmitz, CEO, Public Allies Milwaukee, WI
Kalpna Krishnamurthy, RACE and Gender Justice Program Director & Nancy Haque, Director of Civic Participation and Political Power Western States Center Portland, OR	Anderson Williams, Director – New Initiatives, Oasis Center Nashville, TN
<b>Stakeholders of Grantees</b>	
Adrienne Maree Brown, Executive Director, Ruckus Society Oakland, CA	Evon Peter, Executive Director, Native Movement, Flagstaff, AZ and Anchorage, AK,
Kevin Killer, State Representative, South Dakota, former Fellow, Young People For	
<b>Other Resource Persons</b>	
Tamara Draut, Vice President for Policy and Programs, Demos New York, NY [Grantee – outside core group]	Nadia Moritz, Executive Director, Young Women’s Project Washington, D.C.