



Peer-to-Peer, Phish-to-Pod: Lateral Learning at the Dekko Foundation

There must be something in the water at the Dekko Foundation because their youth philanthropy leadership board, phish, is making serious waves.

phish (Philanthropy Ideas Strategy Heart) is comprised of 10 young people from across the foundation's grantmaking areas of Alabama, Indiana, Iowa, and Minnesota. phish started in 2008 as an experimental project to see what would happen when the Dekko Foundation really walked the talk of youth empowerment.



THE PHISH PROGRAM
OVERSEES AND ADVISES

13

YOUTH PODS
(OR YOUTH ADVISORY
COMMITTEES).

Since 1994, the Dekko Foundation has been sponsoring Youth Pods, which are youth advisory committees for community foundations in Dekko's grantmaking areas. Prior to phish's creation, the Dekko Foundation's adult staff advised all youth philanthropy programming. Now the phish committee has taken responsibility for youth programming and serves as an advisory board for the Youth Pods.

Nolan Sponseller and Victoria Goodwin are two former pod members turned phish leaders from Kosciusko and LaGrange county, Indiana. Victoria recalls, "I decided to apply for phish because I realized that the world's problems are my problems, and phish was a way to be an active participant in finding meaningful solutions."

"phish exists to help the 13 Youth Pods to do philanthropy better " says Victoria. In order to achieve this goal, phish leverages the accessibility of peer-to-peer communication.

Through phish's workshop series, "Youth Philanthropy Sushi: How to get Your Pod on a Roll," and a biannual retreat of the Youth Pods, phish members share best practices, skill-building techniques, and advice with their pod peers. Nolan Sponseller, a sophomore at Taylor University and phish alumni, describes the retreat as an opportunity for collaboration and creativity: "We share advice, challenge traditions, and innovate together. We set the agenda."

Last year's phish retreat was called Planet Fitness. The idea of the retreat was "to share tips on how



to run more effective meetings, to think about how to innovate youth pod grantmaking processes, and to stretch and strengthen their philanthropy muscles,” says Victoria.

“phish helps Youth Pods ask those ‘why’ questions about what they’re doing and how they’re doing it” Nolan adds. “As peer leaders, we remind them that it’s okay to try new strategies and to change things up.”



Tip: Create a monthly newsletter to raise awareness.

Additionally, phish has recently rolled out a newsletter that goes out to all Youth Pod members to keep them informed between retreats. “The monthly newsletter keeps pods aware of what’s going on in the network,

and we also envision it as a bridge between the learning that happens at the biannual retreat and what pods do with this new knowledge,” says Jenna Ott, phish “phacilitator” (an adult resource to the phish leaders).

“Youth can make an incredible impact when adults step back and let us work,” says Nolan. This is phish’s engagement strategy: elevate young people’s voices; the more power and trust you give them the more they will flourish.

“We rely on phish for so many things and we set very high expectations,” says Jenna “and these young people always, always exceed them.”

By giving youth leaders a platform to share their experiences and expertise with their peers, phish creates more opportunities for youth to become self-sufficient, knowledgeable, and engaged community members.



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This case study was written by Kylie Musolf and developed for Foundation Center’s Youth Giving project. Photo provided courtesy of Dekko Foundation . Visit youthgiving.org to view other free resources related to engaging young people in grantmaking.
