

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PHILANTHROPY

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## Purpose Of This Summary

What are innovative strategies and promising practices for engaging youth in philanthropy? How can philanthropic organizations work to better engage marginalized youth? This report aims to help those involved in philanthropic organizations to better understand the contemporary context of youth engagement in philanthropy and to consider the ways in which sustainable youth engagement is essential for building compassionate communities and dynamic societies.

## Background Of The Study

Youth giving their time, energy, and money for the social good is described as *youth philanthropy*. Growing evidence within this field indicates that foundations serve a unique role in fostering youth development. By creating a productive environment in which youth can become empowered, engage in social transformation, strengthen employability and citizenry, and integrate into society, philanthropic foundations play catalytic roles in the youth development landscape. Engagement in philanthropy provides youth with valuable skills and tools that will enable their potential as “community change agents” with benefits for the whole community. While interest has grown steadily in field of youth philanthropy, there remains a lack of systematic resources and information for philanthropic organizations interested in re-modeling their youth participation strategies.

## Opportunities

When youth take part in philanthropy through groups that serve racially, religiously, geographically and culturally diverse communities, a larger community dialogue can be created about values, responsibility, and citizenship. Philanthropy can be a tool for youth to acquire cognitive, social, and emotional skills that enable them to take advantage of opportunities presented at their given stage in life. While helping build youth capacity as civic actors, organizations also benefit from the addition of young people’s insights, energy, and creativity. Within the community, youth engagement in philanthropy creates opportunities to cultivate citizenship and leadership skills which strengthen the overall capacity for community renewal. One of the most significant recorded outcomes is an increase in understanding and respect within communities for the capacity of youth as agents of community change and greater appreciation of youth’s contributions to society.

## Challenges

Two primary challenges include the need to improve access to existing resources and the need to increase awareness and exchange of ideas among groups doing similar work. Another significant difficulty is the exclusion of equity youth by youth serving foundations. There are no one-size fits all approaches to youth civic engagement; organizations must tailor their strategies to serve the needs of disadvantaged youth. There is a particular lack of information about how various initiatives integrate diverse youth voices and participation in their community change efforts. Foundations tend to engage youth who are already engaged, while they struggle to be accessible to those who already feel excluded within their communities.

## Approaches and Strategies

The following approaches and strategies emerged from the literature review:

### ○ **Veritable Youth Engagement**

Veritable youth engagement is founded on the authentic incorporation of youth perspectives and a recognition of the active role youth can take in developing the well-being of their communities. To engage youth, organizations need to create their goals and strategies with youth participation and insight as a key part of their decision-making process.

### ○ **Engaging Equity Youth**

An understanding of equity youth as social agents with insight into their localities counters the prevailing narratives of equity youth as passive beneficiaries of community services. Engaging equity youth requires ongoing commitment to building relationships, while remaining conscious of the challenges of supporting disenfranchised youth. Organizations that engage with more equity youth demonstrate a significant level of commitment required for sustaining safe, supportive, and meaningful settings for ongoing participation in youth development.

### ○ **Capacity Building and Training**

A focus on capacity building to strengthen employability and citizenry is part of a holistic approach to youth empowerment that addresses the need to provide youth with skills that allow them to fulfill their potential as community-change agents. This approach recognizes that building youth capacity as civic actors is crucial for their development of social capital and can contribute to youth outcomes in education and employment.

### ○ **Philanthropic Networks**

Resource and knowledge networks among foundations and organizations working in the field of youth in philanthropy need to be strengthened. Recognizing that growth does not take place in isolation, the practice of collaboration among organizations is a vital means for providing youth with the resources they need to develop their capacity as civic actors.

### ○ **Youth-Youth as Peers**

Youth philanthropy initiatives offer a space for youth to collaborate with rather than compete with their peers and provide a venue for individuals from diverse backgrounds to come together around shared concerns. There is value in hiring young workers and community representatives who understand (and even have experienced) the lived realities of equity groups; these young adults provide valuable insight and identification when working with members of marginalized groups.

### ○ **Adults as Allies**

Youth-adult partnerships emerge as a central practice for cultivating positive youth development and civic engagement. Relationships with adult allies provide essential opportunities for youth to build connections and valuable networks with mentors within their community; these are especially relevant for disadvantaged youth who lack other points of contact for sustained civic engagement.