

# YOUTH GRANTMAKERS CONTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GROWTH

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**With training, youth and adults can successfully cross the generational divide and work together to increase community foundation resources for making a difference in their communities.**

The Council of Michigan Foundations is an association of foundations and corporations which make grants for charitable purposes. As a membership organization, our mission is to enhance, to improve, and to increase philanthropy in Michigan.

*A publication to help engage youth in community foundation development*

## Introduction

I took two Youth Advisory Committee members along with me to make a request to help us meet a challenge grant match to a very wealthy man not known for his generosity. When he turned us down, the youth had the courage to ask him why he did not want to contribute to his own community.

After some discussion, they convinced him to make a donation.

—A community foundation trustee

Youth involvement in philanthropy is rapidly growing and has spread to 30 states in the U.S.A. and other countries including Canada, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Czech Republic, and New Zealand. While community foundations and United Ways are the most common vehicles through which youth become engaged in philanthropy, local governments, schools, 4-H clubs, and other community groups are also involving youth.

Community foundations are taking a key leadership role by engaging youth as resources for problem solving and partners in the growth of the community. They are developing Youth Advisory Committees (YACs) as permanent standing committees. YACs assess youth needs and assets in their communities, do proactive grantmaking, stimulate youth involvement as resources, and collaborate with community foundation boards on fund development.

This article focuses on youth involvement in community foundation fund development. It draws upon 10 years of evaluation research by FERA on youth in philanthropy, and community foundation growth in Michigan. Currently there are 86 Youth Advisory Committees functioning within community foundations or their affiliates in Michigan. Over 8,000 young people have been involved in philanthropic activity over ten years.

## Engaging Youth in Fund Development

Community foundations in Michigan began involving young people in fund development when they were offered a challenge grant with a 2:1 match. The purpose of the grant – the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project – was to both increase their unrestricted grantmaking assets and to engage youth in philanthropy by establishing endowed Youth Funds advised by Youth Advisory Committees.

While many youth have opportunities to participate in car washes and other traditional fundraisers through their schools or other community groups, few have the chance to go on a corporate call or to participate in a major fundraising campaign. YACs have provided opportunities for youth to participate in a range of fund development related activities. During the challenge grant the focus was on raising matching dollars. Since then, YACs have worked to increase the philanthropic dollars available to support youth-related initiatives. YAC fund development related activities include:

### ❖ Learning about fund development.

Youth grantmakers need to first learn how community foundations obtain the resources to make grants. By meeting with staff and the fund development committee, they learn about concepts such as endowment, planned giving, challenge grants, and other forms of leveraging resources.

### ❖ Receiving training.

Some YACs provide joint fund development training opportunities for their members

and community foundation board members. These opportunities may include role playing presentations to potential donors, explaining fund development concepts, talking about the importance of relationship building, and sharing current community foundation strategies.

### ❖ Conducting potential donor visits.

Trained youth and trustees can be paired to talk with individuals or with corporations. They have an opportunity to talk about the YAC's work and to help ask for a major gift for the youth fund or other youth initiative of the community foundation.

### ❖ Presenting at and assisting with events.

YAC members often assist with organizing and implementing annual fund development and other community foundation events. They may talk about their community needs and asset assessments, grantmaking, and community service activities at these events. One community foundation celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its YAC at an annual meeting. YAC alumni spoke about how serving on the YAC has made a difference in their lives.

### ❖ Leveraging resources.

YACs use many different ways to leverage resources to meet the needs of youth in their communities. These include: 1) developing and submitting proposals to other local foundations to obtain funding for big initiatives, 2) offering challenge grants to a program or initiative; 3) asking the community foundation board to co-fund proposals; and 4) providing matching

funds to leverage another funder's challenge dollars.

### ❖ Using the group approach.

A number of youth grantmaking committees have successfully approached service clubs and other community organizations about investing in their work. The youth grantmakers annually present the work of their grantmaking at a club meeting and request additional financial support for the next year.

### ❖ Holding an annual event.

YACs have been known to annually hold an event, such as doing their own theater production or operating a concession stand at a basketball game as a means of gaining both visibility and obtaining additional funds for their grantmaking. YAC members are sensitive about not being viewed as competitors to other fund-raising at their schools and in their community.

### ❖ Modeling youth involvement.

YACs serve as a model for involving youth as resources. Common held stereotypes about youth are challenged, and youth as well as the community foundation receive positive media attention. Community foundation staff and board members usually wear many hats in a community. YAC members are often involved in other organizations as well. Ideas about new ways to involve youth in non-profits and in community problem solving flow out through these individuals. For example, some non-profits have followed the YACs lead and begun to involve youth in fund development activities in their own organizations.

## Benefits

Community foundations can benefit in many ways from involving youth in fund development. Key benefits are:

### ❖ **Increased assets.**

Community foundations can increase their asset levels by establishing permanently endowed youth funds. Potential donors often respond more positively to youth requesting dollars than they do to adults. As one trustee commented, "It is very hard to turn down an enthusiastic young person who wants to make a difference."

### ❖ **New networks.**

YAC members open doors to new networks as they tell their friends, family, grandparents, and neighbors about what they are doing. These networks all represent potential donors and serve to increase community foundation visibility.

### ❖ **New group of donors.**

When youth establish a relationship with community foundations through YACs, they often become current and future donors. One YAC had members empty their pockets at the first meeting and found they had \$89

to contribute to their youth fund. They then challenged the board of trustees to contribute.

### ❖ **New partners.**

Having youth involved as grantmakers can be an attraction to other funding partners. Family and private foundations have provided matching grants to community foundations for youth committees to deal with issues such as violence prevention. The role of these youth grantmakers was vital to the decision by the state of Michigan to distribute Tobacco Settlement Funds through community foundations for healthy youth and healthy senior issues.

### ❖ **New source of energy and enthusiasm.**

The dedication, pride and commitment which is so evident in the YAC participants can provide a sense of renewal for the community foundation. Their enthusiasm is hard not to respond to and is easy to catch.

Young people also benefit in many ways including:

❖ Acquiring increased levels of confidence in their own abilities to both contribute and to lead.

❖ Learning about fund development strategies.

❖ Gaining fund development skills

❖ Meeting community foundation donors and prospects.

❖ Learning about the connections between grantmaking, community leadership, and fund development.

One YAC member said, "Serving on a YAC has taught me a lot about responsibility and showed me that everyone has the power within to make a difference."

Ultimately, communities benefit when youth gain leadership and fund development skills. A longitudinal study of YAC alumni is showing that young people's experience with philanthropy is encouraging them to seek volunteer opportunities to engage in grantmaking and fund development in the nonprofit sector. Others are pursuing studies to prepare themselves for careers in the nonprofit sector and/or the field of philanthropy.

## Lessons Learned

Several important lessons have been learned about engaging youth in community foundation fund development. They are:

❖ Linking youth to fund development efforts can help community foundations in-

crease their assets. As one community foundation donor said, "It is hard to say no to these articulate youth."

❖ Involving youth in philanthropy and in fund development provides a content focus that everyone in a community

can support. It can be an important impetus for starting a new community foundation or for reviving a sleepy inactive one.

❖ Teaming youth with a trustee for one-to-one visits with potential donors helps the

youth feel more comfortable with their fund development opportunity.

❖ Engaging youth in fund development is easier when there is a challenge grant or other specific goal to work toward.

❖ It is important for YACs to purposefully be included in a foundation's fund development plan. This requires good communication, and opportunities for interaction between YAC

and board members who are working on fund development strategies. A current best practice states: "Community Foundations' staff, board members, and volunteers should be encouraged to include YAC members in their Fund Development Plan to assist with the continual growth of the community foundation." This can be done through active participation on fund development calls to prospective donors, community/organization presentations, and other opportunities to talk about the community foundation.

❖ Youth need training and encouragement to be effective fund developers. So do many adult community foundation board members. Offering joint training provides a unique opportunity for youth and adults to learn and grow together.

❖ The visit to a potential donor needs to be scripted without losing spontaneity. Adult board members need to give the young people accompanying them time during the visit to describe their experiences as a youth grantmaker.

## Conclusions

**Y**outh involvement in fund development benefits everyone—community foundations, the youth, and ultimately communities. Changing the paradigm from youth as problems to youth as resources takes time

and requires challenging both adults' and youths' thinking. Having structures in place such as opportunities for adults and youth to interact in meaningful ways and specific links between foundation and YAC fund development efforts can help

facilitate this shift. When new ways of collaboration are modeled by community foundations and their YACs, they can spread throughout the community serving as an impetus for change.

## Resources

### Organizations

**Council of Michigan Foundations** — [www.mcfyp.org](http://www.mcfyp.org)

**Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth** — [www.ccfy.org](http://www.ccfy.org)

**Vancouver Foundation** — [www.vancouver.org](http://www.vancouver.org)

**Youth as Resources** — [www.yar.org](http://www.yar.org)

**Youth on Boards** — [www.youthonboard.org](http://www.youthonboard.org)

### Selected resources

Mawby, Russell G. 1992. *Why Youth? Why Community Foundations?* W.K. Kellogg Foundation: Battle Creek, MI.

Rosen, Matt. 2001. *Changing the Face of Giving: An Assessment of Youth Philanthropy.* The James Irvine Foundation: San Francisco, CA ([www.irvine.org](http://www.irvine.org)).

Tice, Karin E. 1998. *Empowering Youth: Lessons Learned From the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (1991-1997).* Council of Michigan Foundations: Grand Haven, MI.

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