A New Role for Connecticut Youth

Leaders of Social Change

Content

Letter from the President

Dear Colleagues,

As we witness the growing call for social justice across America in the areas of immigration, health care, education, and gay rights, it is increasingly apparent that this call does not always include the voice of young people, on whose lives these issues have the greatest immediate impact. Too often, adults create agendas and engage in dialogue about the issues without the input of those who are most capable of providing firsthand feedback and leadership. Often, youth are regarded as part of the problem, and they are given little opportunity to develop skill sets that allow them to be part of the solution. Youth development programs rarely include efforts to develop the social-political competency and encourage the collective agency of marginalized youth. The active engagement of youth is essential for the healthy development of our young people and our communities.

During the past year, our foundation designed a strategic plan for determining how best to advance youth-led social change within Connecticut. In order to better understand the statewide climate for this work, the Perrin Family Foundation, in partnership with the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, participated in a nine-month process, convening focus groups, and interviewing youth, youth practitioners, funders, and scholars throughout the state. Our purpose was

- to determine the statewide perception of youth-led social change;
- to identify where and how Connecticut youth are organizing for social justice;
- and to assess the climate for further developing the field.

The resulting report presents a broad picture of youth-led social change work in Connecticut. Although it reveals a striking lack of existing programming, it presents an encouraging picture, as there is a strong desire that more be done. Our foundation is committed to the concept of youth organizing and its importance in creating social change, and this data provides a framework that will focus our efforts—efforts that must include partner organizations as we work to support youth as leaders of social change in Connecticut.

We in the state have an exciting opportunity to build on the power of youth-adult partnerships. We hope that this report and our grantmaking strategy will have a powerful impact on existing youth-led social change groups and also help nurture and develop new groups in the future. We encourage you to join with the Perrin Family Foundation in this exciting and important work.

SHEILA PERRIN

"… a simple grant to an organization isn't going to bring about community change."

The Connecticut Landscape

CONNECTICUT HARBORS stark inequities in opportunity for its residents, and perhaps no group is as greatly affected by those disparities as our state's children and youth. Every decision made on the community, institutional, and state level shapes the contours of the lives of Connecticut's young people—yet the voices of our youth are all too often absent from public discourse and critical decision-making processes.

A wealth of research documents the challenges and obstacles facing Connecticut's youth, but there have been few attempts to understand the ways in which young people themselves are working to address them. At the same time, a growing body of national research—conducted by academics and by experts in the field of youth engagement—indicates that creating opportunities for youth to act as leaders of social change has a transformative impact on those young people, on their communities, and on the laws, policies, institutions, and systems that shape their lives. In this regard, however, Connecticut is sadly behind the national curve. In communities throughout the country, young people are leading successful efforts to transform their neighborhoods, communities, and schools. The same is possible in Connecticut.

Opportunity Gaps

In national studies, Connecticut consistently ranks among the top ten states in indicators of child and youth well-being.[1] Behind the numbers, however, lies a disturbingly persistent set of contradictions. Connecticut has the highest per capita income of any state in the country, but the income disparities between rich and poor—and by extension between white communities and communities of color—are growing at a rate higher than any other state in our nation.[2] Although Connecticut is widely acknowledged on the national scene as a "progressive" state, its three largest metropolitan areas have higher rates of racial segregation than metropolitan areas in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Georgia.[3]

These disparities have the greatest impact on our state's children and youth. Young people of color are detained and incarcerated at rates higher than their white peers even when they have committed the same offenses,[4] and Connecticut has been unable to shake its distressing status as the record holder of the nation's largest gaps in educational achievement and opportunity for students of different socioeconomic and racial-ethnic groups.[5] These stark inequities undermine our young people's well-being and compromise the civic health of our state.

The 2011 Connecticut Civil Health Index, a report published by the Secretary of State and the organization Everyday Democracy, underscores the idea that equity is essential to civic health. According to the report, the rates of civic participation in Connecticut consistently correlate with wealth, education levels, race, and ethnicity: "Wealthier, more educated, white people are significantly more likely to register to vote, volunteer, contact public officials, play a leadership role in communities, join organizations and associations, and more."[6] The report concludes that the gaps in civic participation are not the result of apathy, but instead reflect "opportunity gaps" that can be attributed to differences in income and education that are linked to race and ethnicity and that affect young people very early in life.[7]

The Need for Equitable Access and Philanthropic Support

The Connecticut Civic Health Index did not specifically examine civic engagement among youth, but researchers have found that the likelihood that a young person will engage is strongly influenced by "opportunity structures," the availability of roles and settings that provide meaningful and desirable opportunities for action in the community.[8] Researchers also found that community conditions, such as poverty, unemployment and violence—circumstances keenly felt by young people in Connecticut—inhibit civic engagement, particularly among youth of color.[9] A national study conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) noted that, although young people of color and low income are often acutely aware of injustice and inequity in their lives, they lack access to the opportunities to make changes at the community level.[10]

The very inequities in circumstance and engagement that make social change in Connecticut necessary also make it difficult to attain. The participants in this report's field scan were quick to draw connections between Connecticut's race and income segregation and its political and geographic boundaries. As one practitioner observed, "There are 169 towns in Connecticut, and they operate as independent fiefdoms." Absent any regional decision-making processes, resource-sharing infrastructure, or community-building structures, residents of urban, suburban, and rural communities seldom have cause or occasion to share and compare their divergent experiences or reflect on common experiences.

> "There is a perception that Connecticut is progressive and a perception that Connecticut is wealthy, and yet when you are fighting on the front lines for social change it doesn't feel like it's either of those."
>
> —Renae Reese, Executive Director, Connecticut Center for a New Economy

The social and economic rifts that divide Connecticut's communities also influence the balance of power at the state capitol as legislators determine laws, policies, and resource distribution. Bridgeport, the largest city in Connecticut, has a population of less than 150,000, and the five largest cities in Connecticut only comprise 19 percent of the state population.[11] As a result, the majority of officials elected to the state legislature represent communities that are often predominantly white and affluent. These communities may not consider that their own needs, well-being, and self-interest are intertwined with those of Connecticut's low-income residents and residents of color. This shortsightedness, in turn, often leads to laws, policies, and resource allocations that reinforce rather than challenge inequity.

Connecticut is home to more than 1,500 foundations with a combined $7.3 billion in assets. These foundations award more than $800 million in grants annually, making Connecticut rank sixteenth among the states in total foundation giving.[12] Although there is no detailed data on how many of those grants remain in Connecticut or on their areas of focus, many of our state's philanthropic entities seek to ameliorate societal inequities by awarding nonprofit organizations grants that meet basic human needs, expand educational opportunities, and promote community health, development, and well-being.

Yet, as the National Council on Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) broadly observes in a recent report on national philanthropic trends, "the persistence of long-standing disparities amid the advent of strategic philanthropy suggests that something is missing from the current paradigm."[13] Given the severity of the inequities in our state, the question NCRP poses is of critical importance:

When so many systemic disparities persist despite billions of philanthropic dollars being invested in various programs and communities, how successful have even the most strategic philanthropic interventions really been? Indeed, philanthropy's relatively scarce resources will never by themselves solve the systemic problems that manifest themselves as disparities in our society. That is why philanthropy needs to leverage its limited resources by prioritizing and empowering underserved communities.[14]

In all but one instance, youth groups in Connecticut have not appeared on the radar.

Youth-led social change is a potent method for challenging inequity and ensuring leadership, empowerment, and active engagement in underserved communities. During the past decade, numerous national foundations have commissioned studies that document the proliferation and work of youth-led social change groups. In all but one instance, youth groups in Connecticut have not appeared on the radar.[15]

The Perrin Family Foundation worked in partnership with the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) to examine ways in which to strengthen and expand youth-led social change efforts in the state. We conducted interviews and led focus groups with young people, youth practitioners, grassroots groups, community organizers, and funders across Connecticut to inform our learning. (For methodology and a complete list of participants, see page 34 and 36.) Our hope is that this field scan on youth-led social change in Connecticut will

- raise awareness about the potential of youth to transform their lives and communities;

- identify the challenges and obstacles facing the field;

- and suggest ways to strengthen and deepen the infrastructure needed to create environments that support youth as leaders of social change.

"I've seen organizations gather youth to go up to the capitol in their t-shirts and advocate, and then I wonder what happens when the youth go home."

Defining Youth-Led Social Change

YOUNG PEOPLE have been at the center of movements for progressive social change throughout the history of our nation. There are a number of ways in which young people become involved in change movements. Some may have a generational exposure to civic activism through their families; others may have a critical awakening during their college years; others may choose to participate in the political electoral process. During the past two decades, however, young people—especially low-income youth and youth of color—have connected to social change efforts primarily through participation in nonprofit organizations.[16]

Shawn Ginwright, Associate Professor of Education at San Francisco State University and a leading expert on youth development and youth activism, reports that a significant shift took place in the youth sector approximately 20 years ago:

During the 1980s and 1990s, considerable public and private resources were designated to harm reduction and prevention strategies for youth. Adolescence was traditionally seen as rife with pitfalls—pregnancy, alcohol and drug use, crime, violence, and truancy—that needed to be avoided. The underlying assumption was that young people needed to be "fixed" before they could enter into productive adulthood.... Around the same time, a handful of youth researchers developed new language and models that saw youth as community assets. Public policy, they argued, should shift from prevention to youth development—building supports for young people and creating the opportunities for growth, learning, and exploration that are central to preparing youth for adulthood.[17]

Just as youth development practitioners pushed prevention-strategy specialists to expand their view, Ginwright continues, a new generation of youth workers began to expand the boundaries of traditional youth development:

Despite the welcome shift towards viewing youth as community assets, the goals of positive youth development focused primarily on the individual— the skills, competencies, and developmental assets each young person needs to make the successful transition to adulthood.... [T]he choices young people make and the support they receive (or don't receive) are informed by broader social and political contexts. These include systemic barriers that are shaped by race and economic inequality [as well as by] more subtle social and political barriers.[18]

These innovators in the field understood they could not address the need for positive youth development without examining the broader social, political, and economic realities of young people's day-to-day lives. They advanced a range of new approaches that linked the collective empowerment of historically marginalized youth to community transformation. This work led to the development of a dynamic new framework for youth engagement, including opportunities for youth-led social change.

For the purposes of this report, youth-led social change refers to a long-term process that builds the confidence, knowledge, skills, and collective leadership

of young people while addressing the root causes of injustice and inequity in their lives and communities. Youth organizing, which FYCO defines as "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" is a proven and particularly effective strategy for advancing youth-led social change.[19]

YOUTH-LED SOCIAL CHANGE

refers to a long-term process that builds the confidence, knowledge, skills, and collective leadership of young people while addressing the root causes of injustice and inequity in their lives and communities.

The Youth Engagement Continuum

The youth engagement continuum, developed by the nonprofit organization LISTEN, Inc., in 2003, helps situate youth-led social change relative to other prevailing approaches to youth work.[20]

Each of the five strategies described in the continuum offers services and programs to young people and plays an important role in supporting their healthy growth and development as individuals. Communities benefit most, however, when young people also have meaningful opportunities to engage in civic leadership and social change. The development of strong and vibrant cities, communities, and states requires the intentional cultivation of organizations at each level of the continuum.[21]

STRATEGY				SYSTEMIC CHANGE
INDIVIDUAL				
YOUTH SERVICES	**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**	**LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**	**YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**	**YOUTH ORGANIZING**

ROLE OF YOUTH				
Client	**Participants and interns/staff**	**Participants, leaders, interns/staff, and board members**	**Leaders, interns/staff, and board members**	**Members, leaders, organizers, interns/ staff, and board members**

ACTIONS				
Provide services to address individual problems and behaviors	Provide supports and safe spaces	**Incorporate youth development AND**	**Incorporate youth development, leadership development AND**	**Incorporate youth development, leadership development, youth civic engagement, AND**
Define programming around treatment, prevention, and basic needs	Foster caring relationships between youth and adults; support youth-adult partnerships	Offer leadership opportunities within the program and organization	Promote political education and awareness	Offer opportunities to serve as core staff and governing body
	Develop talents and assets	Deepen historical and cultural understanding of shared experiences and community issues	Build skills and capacity for identification and analysis of issues and for action around issues	Build a membership base to which youth leaders are accountable
	Provide opportunities for growth, development, and new roles	Build skills and capacities for making decisions and solving problems	Cultivate build collective identity as agents of social change	Develop campaigns and utilizes tactics— including direct action— to effect systemic change
	Build individual competencies	Provide opportunities to participate in community projects	Engage in advocacy efforts	Take active roles in alliances and coalitions
		Support youth-adult partnerships		

Characteristics of Youth-Led Social Change Organizations

FEATURES	PRACTICES	EXAMPLES
Respects youth voice and culture	Offer open and safe environment for youth to share personal challenges and life experiences, often through creative expression and popular culture	Youth host an open-mic event to encourage others to speak out about what they experience in schools.
Promotes collective leadership development	Provide opportunities to assume new roles, master challenges, and practice collective leadership by facilitating dialogue, developing goals, and participating in shared decision making	Youth research truancy and graduation rates in their schools and then plan and facilitate a community meeting to share what they have learned.
Fosters understanding and analysis of community and society	Deepen understanding and awareness of the historical, cultural, and political factors that shape community conditions, including the power dynamics specific to the issues of youth identify	Youth participate in workshop sessions about root causes of educational inequity and analyze the role of the local board of education, city council, mayor, and state/federal legislature in education decision making.
Encourages collective agency and strategic action	Build relationships with and establish accountability to a broader group or community; develop a concrete agenda for actions that will result in sustained and lasting change around an issue youth identify; implement a campaign to apply the necessary pressures to reach goals	Youth engage in a listening campaign to identify issues and develop an action and accountability campaign to change the school district's tardy policy.
Values youth-adult partnerships	Work with young people, not for them; build relationships with caring adults who provide support, guide access to resources, and foster group accountability	Adult staff/mentor helps youth access information and identify potential allies; staff/mentor also supports youth in overcoming challenges and obstacles.

The Features of Youth-Led Social Change

For some, the notion of youth organizing may elicit images of large groups of loud young people storming city hall or leading traffic-blocking marches, chanting and carrying signs. Although public demonstration is indeed one of many tactics in a change maker's toolkit, the process of youth-led social change both begins and ends with careful analysis and thoughtful reflection.

In Rhode Island, for example, youth organizers at the Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM) are engaged in a campaign to challenge discriminatory policing practices. During the course of their multiyear campaign, youth leaders conducted research through surveys, raised awareness through multimedia productions, and are now working toward the passage of a comprehensive racial profiling prevention act in the state legislature. In Brooklyn, New York, young people from the United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park (UPROSE), an environmental justice organization, are monitoring air and water quality and using their data on community toxins to lead campaigns for clean air and water. By partnering with adult allies, these young people defeated plans to build a power plant that would have increased the level of pollutants in their community. (For more examples of successful youth organizing efforts, see the case studies on pages 10–11.)

National experts in the field have identified several key characteristics of effective youth-led social change efforts.[22] The chart above describes key characteristics of youth-led social groups.

Effective youth-organizing groups intentionally develop the leadership capabilities of low-income youth of color, who are most affected by injustice. FCYO's national survey found that youth-organizing groups across the country had, on average, four staff members who had formerly been youth participants in the group. Youth-led groups also develop the organizational decision-making and management skills of young people. More than 75 percent of youth-organizing groups engage their youth in fundraising, strategic planning, program evaluation, and staff hiring processes. FCYO's survey also found that as youth-organizing groups develop and mature, they advance their campaigns through strategic partnerships. Three out of four youth-organizing groups are involved in networks or alliances at a local, state, regional, or national level.[23]

CASE STUDY

UNTIL RECENTLY, students that were late to school in the Los Angeles Unified School District were at risk of receiving a $250 ticket from school and city police officers for violating a "daytime curfew" ordinance. The combined efforts of the Community Rights Campaign (CRC) of the Labor/Community Strategy Center, the Youth Justice Coalition, CADRE (Community Asset Development Redefining Education), and other allied groups have changed that.

Ashley Franklin, a youth organizer, explains that the CRC "was formed to challenge the criminalization of black and brown life." In the early 2000s, members of LA's Bus Riders Union, an intergenerational organizing project of the Labor/Community Strategy Center, were running a campaign to ensure free accessible bus passes for LA students. While engaged in community outreach for that campaign, leaders repeatedly heard about students being charged for being late for school. Union members formed a youth and adult "study group" and for more than two years met regularly to learn how the issue was impacting students. They eventually decided to launch a campaign focused on truancy ticketing.

Young people in LA high schools lead the work of the CRC. Students are involved and engaged through community outreach and through school-based chapters and action clubs at local high schools. Youth leaders spent two years gathering and analyzing more than 1,000 surveys about students' experiences with truancy, police, and school discipline.

To substantiate their own investigation, youth submitted a public records request to the LA school district and police department for statistics and a demographic breakdown on tickets and citations issued to students. It took more than a year to get the data they requested. When they did, they discovered that, over a five-year period, students had received more than 47,000 citations and that the ticketing enforcement disproportionately targeted youth of color.

Young people used creative strategies (from public art exhibits to poetry performances) to bring attention to the issues. They gathered petitions, held rallies, and secured print, radio, and television news coverage. At the same time, adult organizers helped youth leaders build alliances to support their efforts—alliances with other local organizations, activist attorneys who could lend legal expertise, and city council members who wanted the truancy ordinance reformed.

For the youth leaders and organizers, celebrations of the "small" victories along the way—getting the police department to release the ticket data and getting CNN coverage of the issue—were essential for building and sustaining hope, confidence, and momentum. Their perseverance paid off when, after more than five years, they won a breakthrough victory. In addition to obtaining a directive from the school police chief that forbid officers to issue truancy tickets to students on their way to school, the city council unanimously approved the decriminalization of tardiness and truancy.

Don Cipriani, Director of the Just and Fair Schools Fund at Public Interest Projects and a funder of the CRC campaign, emphasizes that the effort "was based around very deep and intense leadership development work with youth." Cipriani adds that, from his perspective as a funder, youth organizing is critical for social change because youth "bring greater creativity and a greater willingness to have an assertive and ambitious vision and agenda. They have fresh ideas that break the mold, widen the conversation, and bring bold new perspectives that would otherwise be missing. They push the debate forward in a way that couldn't happen otherwise. Policy and advocacy groups can complement this," he continues, "but they could never replace the voice of that direct experience and the power that lies within it, unique to the youth leaders of the effort." According to Cipriani, investing in leadership development and the organizing process has a deeper "return on investment" because "the power and capacity youth gain through organizing transfers over time and across issues."

CASE STUDY

JOREL MOORE, formerly a youth organizer with the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) and now a sophomore at Manhattanville College, reflects on how youth organizing efforts ensured that he and his peers could get to school every day—and how those efforts changed him:

"Before last year I had never really thought about how we get our MetroCards (just like kids in the suburbs probably don't think about how their schoolbus is paid for). In December 2009, New York City's Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) announced that, because of a severe budget crunch, they would be "phasing out" free MetroCards for public school students.

What impact would this have on students? A normal subway ride costs $2.25 one-way. Students' families would now have to come up with $900 to $1,000 per year per child in school! We [at UYC] started to talk about the issue as a matter of fairness. The expense would affect low-income families and students dramatically.

Research in organizing involves more than the research you would do for a school paper. It involves talking to people who have been working on the issue for a while. We needed to learn more about the MTA and how it is funded, so we met with MTA representatives who explained the MTA budget to us. UYC leaders also spoke about the MetroCard issue at our monthly Student Union meeting.

We decided that we needed to run a campaign to save the MetroCards. [We] formed a coalition called Students for Transportation Justice (STJ). We developed a plan that included many different actions to demand free MetroCards for students. UYC/STJ held rallies outside of the MTA offices, during which members of the Transit Workers Union, city council members, and student leaders spoke. We mailed letters to the governor, mayor, and chairman of the MTA requesting that they meet with students to explain how these cuts would affect students and their families. When we received no response, we hand-delivered the letters personally to the mayor's

office and to the chairman. We held daily protests at the subway station that Mayor Bloomberg uses to get to work. We rallied outside of Governor Paterson's office in Manhattan. We also took the fight to the state capitol in Albany. We mobilized about 50 students and parents to go to Albany and speak with 24 state assembly members and senators.

Finally, UYC/STJ coordinated a school walkout of more than 1,000 public school students. The decision to walk out of school was not an easy one—but we had already taken all of the appropriate steps: met with policy makers and elected officials, testified at hearings, held rallies, built alliances, and told our story through the media. All the major media sources in the city—and the Associated Press, which reached Los Angeles—covered the walkout and rally.

Six days after UYC's walkout, the state, the city, and the MTA announced a deal to save the free student MetroCards. In its official statement, the MTA acknowledged that what made the difference was the organized students who pushed to find a way to save student MetroCards: "We heard loud and clear at our public hearings, in meetings with student leaders, and in protests around the city that charging students would have a life-changing impact on the ability of New Yorkers to receive a quality education."

During the campaign, students who had been shy about speaking in class emceed rallies of hundreds of students. I had never talked to the media before, but suddenly I was on TV and in the newspaper. Youth who previously hadn't even known who their city council representatives were met with them and spoke out about what we needed. That's one thing I love about youth organizing—students get to take on all kinds of leadership roles."

Geography of Youth Organizing

According to FCYO's most recent national survey, there are more than 180 organizations in the United States that engage young people, predominantly ages 13 to 19, from low-income communities in youth organizing. The Northeast has the highest concentration of youth-organizing groups, most of which were established in the late 1990s and early 2000s and which have existed, on average, for 15 years.
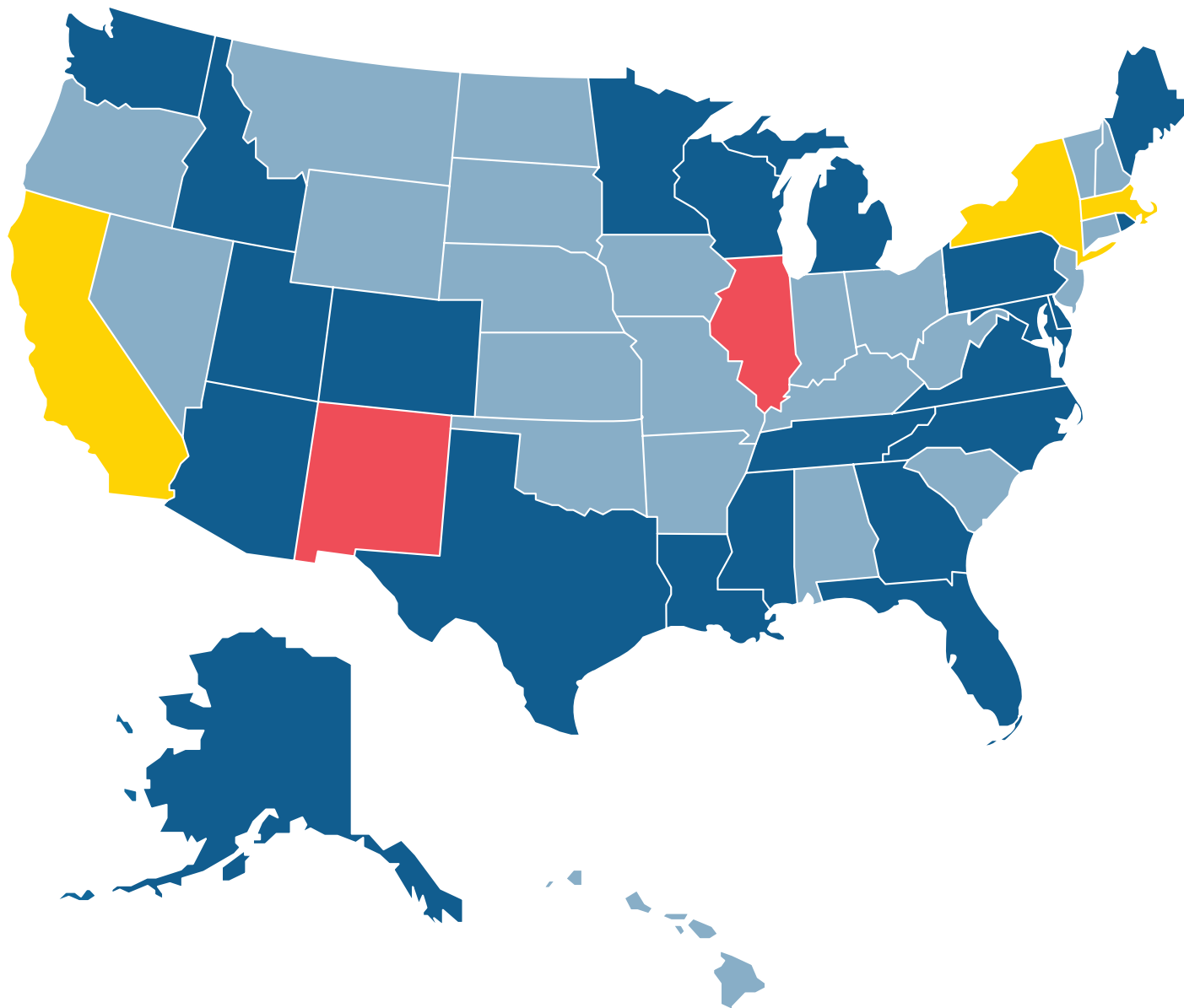
■ ≤ 4 groups per state

■ 5 – 15 groups per state

■ ≥ 16 groups per state

■ Unreported

The Benefits of Youth-Led Social Change

Youth-led social change efforts are founded on the belief that individual growth and community transformation are mutually reinforcing and inextricably linked. At its core, youth-led social change seeks to transform not just the individual but also the individual's community and, ultimately, society itself. When young people are authentically engaged—when they have the opportunity not just to express themselves, but also to participate in deciding issues that affect them directly—communities, institutions, and social systems become more inclusive, responsive, and accountable to the needs and interests of young people. The victories gained by youth leaders of social change, in turn, expand equitable opportunities and resources for all young people. The benefits of youth-led social change are well documented.

Benefits to Young People

Builds core youth development competencies

As shown in the Youth Engagement Continuum on page 8, youth-led social change builds on key features of youth development efforts and shares many of its outcomes. The Forum for Youth Investment has found that engaging young people as partners in public action for change creates in those young people a greater sense of safety and belonging, a heightened sense of confidence and self-efficacy, and a deeper understanding of and connection to their peers and the broader community.[24] When the Ford Foundation commissioned a multiyear study of groups that focused on youth leadership for civic activism, it found that youth-led social change groups were particularly effective at engaging "hardest to reach" youth and that these groups achieved core developmental outcomes at a rate comparable to or higher than that of other youth development organizations.[25]

Expands sociopolitical capacity

Youth development focuses on providing young people with support, skills, and opportunities to shape their individual choices, behaviors, and direction. These efforts, however, generally fail to help youth understand the structural barriers that impede their equitable access to the resources and opportunities essential for their success.[26] Described by some as the "missing link" in youth development,[27] sociopolitical capacity is defined as "the evolving, critical understanding of the political, economic, cultural and other systemic forces that shape society and one's status within it."[28] Youth-led social change advances sociopolitical development by empowering young people to draw connections between their individual experiences and the experiences of others and by helping them to analyze the broader social and political landscape in which they occur.

Young people who experience injustice often feel that the circumstances of their lives and communities are beyond their control. As youth develop sociopolitical capacity, they gain new analytical skills, knowledge, and relationships that enable them to see how their experiences are shared by others, shaped by history, informed by broader societal structures, and mediated by the community's willingness to accept—or reject—the status quo. For young people who have experienced oppression, inequity, or injustice, this heightened critical awareness serves as the primary launching pad for deep and meaningful civic engagement.

Cultivates civic ownership and capacity

Studies of civic engagement find that engagement levels are lower among youth of color, low-income youth, and youth who have not had access to postsecondary education.[29] Although popular discourse often attributes these trends to "apathy," civic engagement research advances three alternative narratives.

First, traditional indicators of civic engagement—voting practices, volunteerism, and community service, for example—overlook the many, more nuanced ways in which youth might contribute to civic life. Second, youth in these circumstances often face structural barriers (involvement in the justice system or limited access to civics education, for example), which reinforce the individual's feelings of marginalization and create obstacles to participation. Third, these young people

Effect of Youth-Led Social Change Activities on Youth Development Outcomes

Activities

Identify and analyze issues
- Design and conduct surveys
- Facilitate dialogue with peers and community members
- Research topics and community issues
- Collect and analyze data

Outreach and education
- Employ creative tools and strategies to raise awareness (art, media, performances, posters, flyers, etc.)
- Access traditional and social media outlets to get out the message
- Recruit peers and allies

Action
- Encourage collective visioning and problem solving
- Brainstorm solutions
- Develop campaign plan and goals
- Influence decision makers through direct action

Reflection
- Facilitate group discussions and debriefings
- Evaluate lessons learned

Outcomes

Emotional Competency
- Increased confidence, sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and capability
- Increased sense of belonging and connectedness to others and community
- Increased sense of purpose, accomplishment, and control
- Hopefulness and positive vision for future
- Emotional, spiritual, and psychological healing and wellness

Social Competency
- Commitment to cooperation and teamwork
- Heightened sense of responsibility and accountability to a group
- Understanding and respect of differing perspectives
- Development of positive relationships with peers and adults

Academic and Cognitive Competency
- Critical thinking skills
- Research skills
- Written and oral communication skills
- Public speaking skills
- Ability to make plans and assess own progress
- Development of transferable skills for academics and future employment

Civic Competency
- Broader worldview and understanding of individual's role, value, and power in society
- Sense of collective agency
- Increased social capital and networks
- Understanding of personal and collective ability to change circumstances and influence systems and political processes
- Sense of civic responsibility, concern, and commitment to welfare of community

lack access to the "opportunity structures" that facilitate civic engagement.[30]

A recent study of "non-college" poor and working class youth cited "the absence of opportunity" as "the single most important factor in explaining low levels of engagement."[31] Organizations that engage youth as leaders of social change transform young people's

otherwise debilitating encounters with injustice into meaningful opportunities for engagement. A multiyear, longitudinal study conducted by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform found that youth engaged in organizing participated in civic and political action at levels higher than other students nationwide. These young people also indicated that they planned to remain actively involved for the long-term.[32]

Benefits to the Community

Exposes others to the unique perspective and insights of young people

The absence of diverse, authentic voices of youth from public discourse undermines the strength of communities. Young people are experts on their own lives and life challenges. Youth-led social change acknowledges the value of their expertise. When young people are engaged in critical discussions and become partners in community problem solving and decision making, the community benefits from their otherwise untapped knowledge and experience. The National League of Cities Institute on Youth Family and Education has found that "the advice, support and action of young people can help ensure that cities craft effective policies, cultivate the next generation of citizens, and find ways to enhance the quality of life in their communities." It notes that authentic youth engagement has led to budget savings and revenue generation, improved school curriculum, and more relevant and accessible services for youth and families.[33]

Challenges negative stereotypes and forges strong relationships between youth and adults

When young people are actively involved in social change efforts, adult stakeholders in the community—parents, teachers, neighborhood leaders, elected officials, system administrators—begin to embrace the strengths, talents, and assets that young people bring to the table. This shift in culture normalizes youth in community decision-making roles and strengthens positive relationships between youth and adults.

An evaluation of a multiyear youth voice initiative in the San Francisco Bay Area found that youth-led efforts for reforms in local child welfare systems not only led to changes in policies but to changes in institutional culture. As system administrators and child welfare staff became more receptive and responsive to youth participation, they more frequently asked young people for their input and more frequently acted on their suggestions.[34]

Prompts systems changes and reforms, ensuring more equitable access to resources and opportunities

Youth-led social change empowers young people to question the status quo, challenge ways in which prevailing norms and policies perpetuate structural inequities, and advance alternative visions of socially just communities. As young people assert their voices, their needs, goals, and hopes move away from the margins of public debate into the center of public discourse. With sustained effort, youth organizers across the country have generated concrete and lasting changes—from effecting reforms in education, justice, and child welfare systems to expanding access to healthy foods and environments. In doing so, young people have also increased transparency and accountability in decision-making structures from which young people, people of color, and other marginalized groups historically have been excluded. A 2011 report from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform found that youth and community organizing not only increases school districts' capacity and improves student achievement outcomes, it also "builds democratic capacity to sustain meaningful reform over the long term."[35]

The Forum for Youth Investment has found that engaging young people as partners in public action for change creates in those young people a greater sense of safety and belonging, a heightened sense of confidence and self-efficacy, and a deeper understanding of and connection to their peers and broader community.
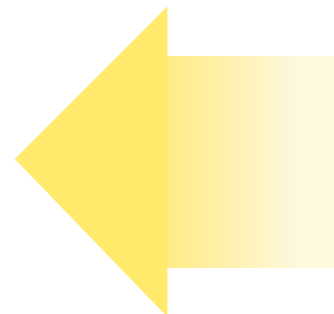
"We create strategies without including the people who are affected by the strategies."

Statewide Challenges

THE FIELD SCAN found few Connecticut groups that meet the definition of youth-led social change articulated in this report (see page 8). When asked to reflect on the extent to which young people in Connecticut are engaged in social change, scan participants responded, after long pauses, with one of these two responses: "I just don't see it happening" and "It's not happening enough." The key findings listed here reflect the collective insights of local stakeholders into the challenges facing Connecticut in the field of youth-led social change. An understanding of these challenges makes it possible to find opportunities and develop strategies for establishing the field in the state.

Connecticut lacks a common or shared definition of youth-led social change.

When asked to define or describe youth-led social change, interviewees' responses generally fell into one of three categories:

1. YOUTH-LED SOCIAL CHANGE = *Individual change*
According to this definition, youth acquire new knowledge or awareness that changes their personal decision-making processes and behaviors. For example, a young person who becomes aware of the health risks of fast food may begin to eat healthier food.

2. YOUTH-LED SOCIAL CHANGE = *Cultural and relational change*
According to this definition, youth develop new relationships with adults and peers and, as a result, individuals and communities experience shifts in attitudes, beliefs, and norms. For example, a young person may become more tolerant and accepting of someone of a different religion or sexuality.

Youth Organizing in New England

■ (dark blue)	≤ 4 groups per state
■ (yellow)	≥ 16 groups per state
■ (light blue)	Unreported

The dearth of youth-organizing efforts in Connecticut—underscored by the absence of reporting in FCYO's national field scan—is particularly striking given the successes of youth-organizing efforts in our bordering states.

CHART 1

How Funders and Practitioners Perceive Youth-led Social Change

FUNDERS

30%
change in
Individuals

53%
change in
Relationships/Culture

53%
change in
Institutions/Systems

PRACTITIONERS

65%
change in Individuals

48%
change in
Relationships/Culture

26%
change in
Institutions/Systems

10
Identifying
Issues

8
Building
Knowledge

13
Building
Skills

4
Making
Recommendations

4
Being at the
Decision-Making
Table

8
Implementing
Solutions
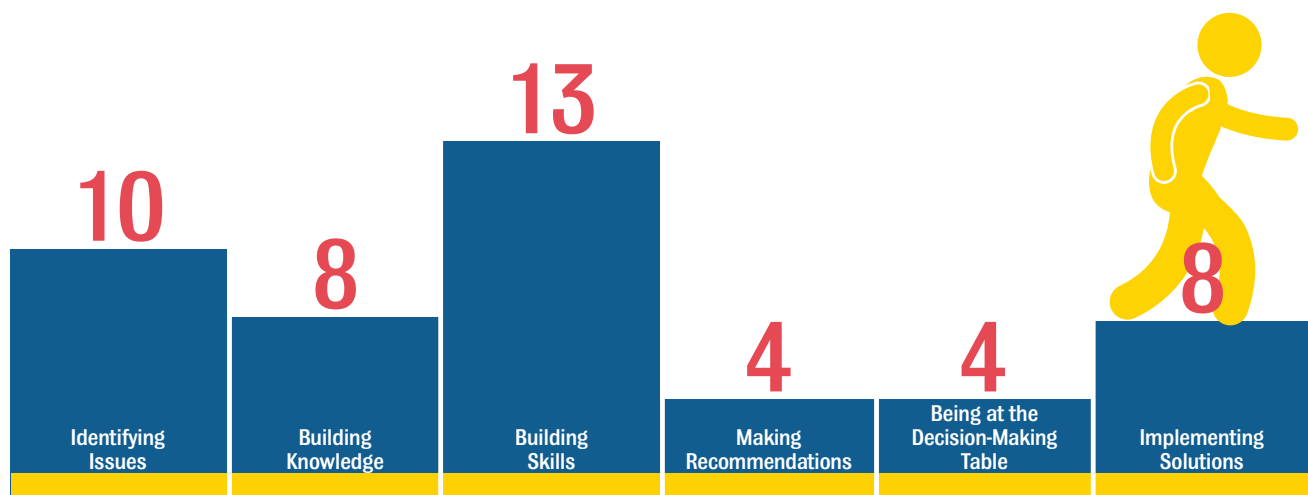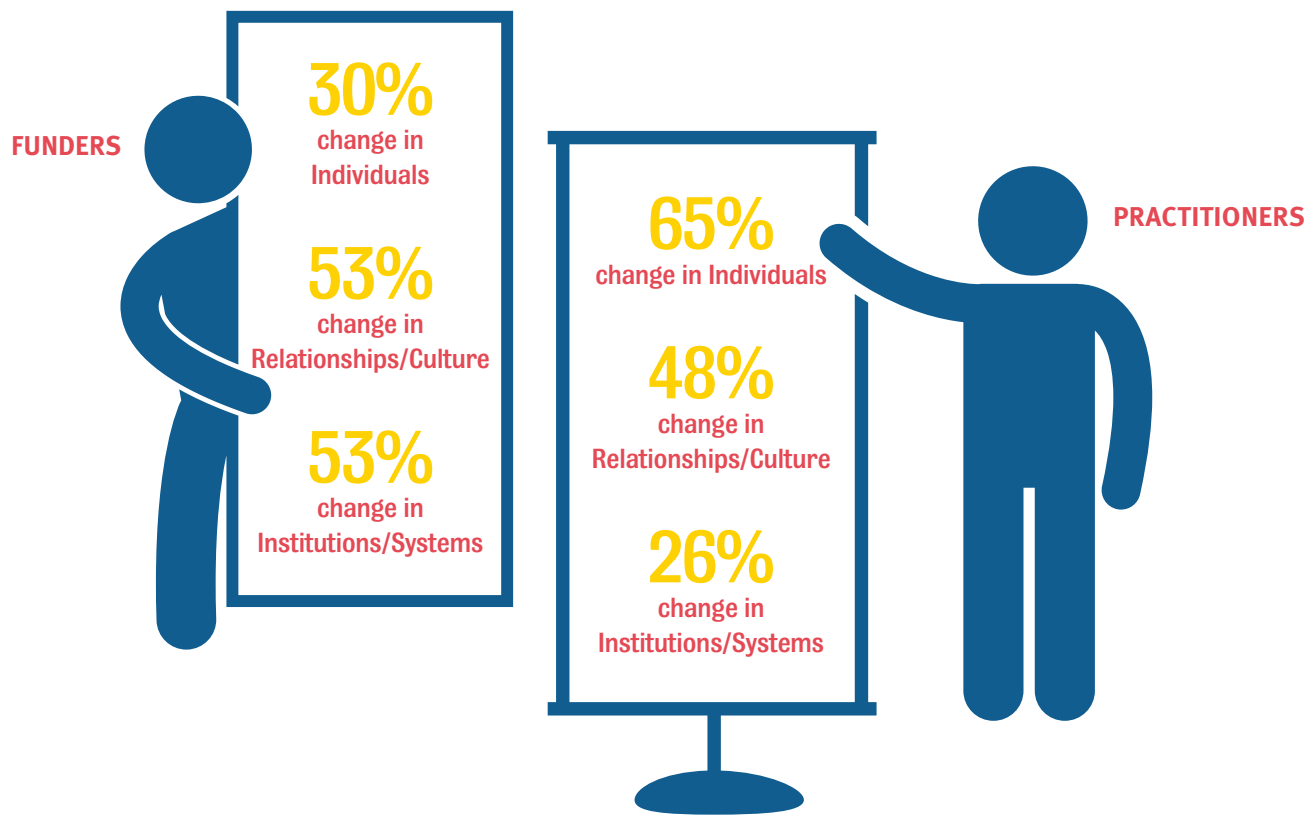
CHART 2

Steps of Youth-Led Social Change Process

When asked about their process for engaging youth in social change, most practitioners described examples of young people identifying issues, building knowledge and awareness of those issues among their peers or community, and building new skills. Few practitioners provided examples of engaging young people in other important steps of a social change process, such as making recommendations for change, being at the decision-making table, or implementing and monitoring the solutions they recommended. Some critical steps—such as conducting a power analysis, planning a campaign strategy, and engaging in group reflection—were not mentioned at all.

3. YOUTH-LED SOCIAL CHANGE = *Institutional and systemic change*

According to this definition, youth build their collective agency and act together to build power, affect changes in policy, and challenge injustice. For example, youth may work together to challenge school discipline policies that disproportionately punish students of color.

As indicated in the chart on the facing page, in this field scan, youth practitioners tended to define youth-led social change as individual or behavioral change; funders were more likely to frame it as institutional or systemic change.

The prevailing approach to youth-led social change in Connecticut reflects the state's strong service provision and advocacy culture.

Numerous interviewees commented on Connecticut's "service provision" mentality, noting that youth service agencies and youth development organizations typically focus on individual skills, behaviors, and personal decision making, rather than on building the collective capacity of young people to influence and lead community change. Connecticut has hundreds of nonprofit organizations that provide young people with services and supports to navigate the obstacles created by inequity, but few actively engage young people as leaders in efforts to challenge and change the policies, practices, institutions, and systems that create and perpetuate these inequities.

Organizations that do seek to engage young people in creating positive community change most often do so through short-term projects. For example, young people might identify a social issue and address it through a community service or awareness project. This approach undoubtedly supports the development of youth leadership skills and helps raise awareness of social issues among youth and their broader community. It stops short, however, of concerted and strategic collective action to ensure that those in positions of power make the changes in policy or practice necessary for sustained and lasting change. As one youth leader pointed out during a focus group, "Youth identify problems, but aren't part of developing the solutions."

One funder highlighted the key difference between traditional youth programming and youth-led social change models:

Youth development comes from primarily a programmatic point of view. You can fund leadership development programs or service-learning projects that lead to doing something of significance in the community…. But if what we're looking at is engaging young people in redefining what it means to live in a community or in a state and engaging them in thinking about social and economic justice for the long term—their generation and the generations to come—that's different.

For example, teens might paint a mural to raise awareness about gun violence in their community, but the mural alone will not alter the accessibility of guns in that community. Youth might organize a book drive to

SERVICE PROVISION addresses social problems by offering services and programs designed to meet individuals' basic and immediate needs, such as food, housing, counseling, tutoring, and safe after-school activities. Service provision does not address the root causes of social issues, and the people whose needs are being met are generally engaged as clients and recipients.

ADVOCACY seeks to educate, inform, and create change or reform in public policy and practice. Although advocates may be in contact with those affected by the problem they seek to address, advocacy efforts do not necessarily involve those impacted in the process of addressing the issue.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING is a process that builds the collective power of individuals to challenge the status quo and make the changes they want to see in their communities. Community organizing seeks to alter relationships of power by ensuring that those directly affected by social problems are creating solutions that lead to lasting structural and institutional change.

(Both advocacy and community organizing have the potential to lead to social change, but a key difference between advocacy and organizing is *who* is doing the work. Advocacy happens *for* or *on behalf of* impacted individuals while community organizing seeks to build individuals' capacity to lead and advocate for themselves.)

CHART 3

Challenges for Youth-Led Social Change in CT, according to all Scan Participants

72% lack of capacity

57% adultism

57% fear of tough talks

74% funding culture/practice
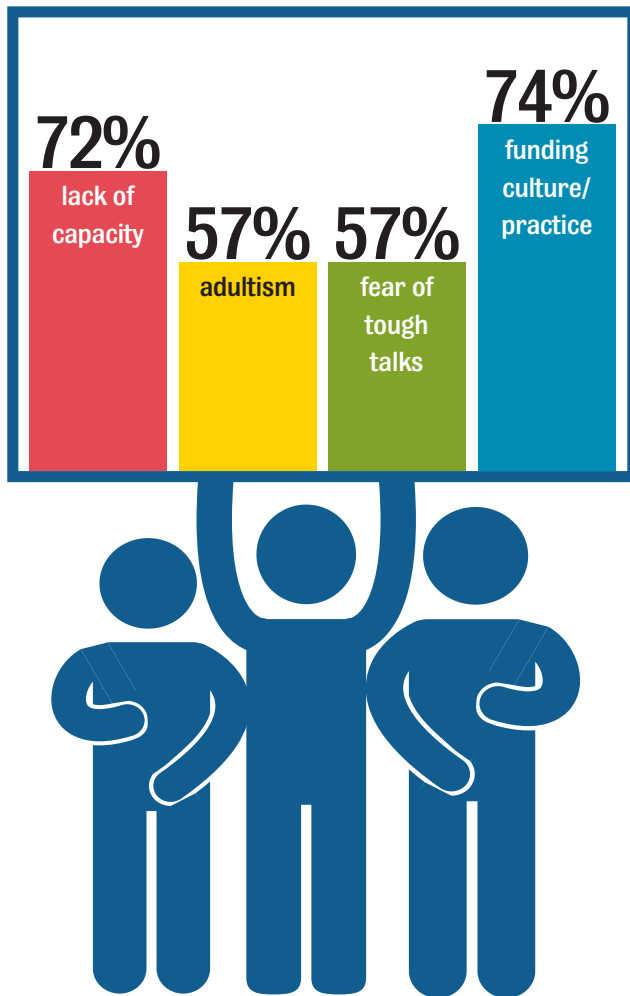
fill the shelves of their near-empty school library, but the need for additional school resources will persist. Youth might host a community forum on school reform, but the conversation, while meaningful, is not enough to ensure that their school district will heed students' suggestions.

When broader advocacy efforts focused on systemic change do involve young people, their role is often circumscribed. "I see young people involved in tactics," explained one practitioner, "but not in the strategy or the frame. Those are created by adults." Funders shared this observation, noting that youth involvement in advocacy efforts does not necessarily mean that young people have been meaningfully engaged. "I've seen [organizations] gather youth to go up to the capitol in

their t-shirts and advocate," one funder said, "and then I wonder what happens when the youth go home." Another funder observed that groups might mobilize young people without prioritizing their leadership development. "I hear about folks doing things like marches for education, and a bunch of kids are marching or might be doing the emceeing, but as far as opening their eyes to what change really looks like and how you affect it? I just don't see it."

Front-line youth workers and youth-serving organizations need additional tools, skills, and capacity to effectively support youth-led social change.

The need for additional staff and organizational training and capacity was among the most frequently cited explanation as to why Connecticut lacks robust youth-led change efforts.

Reflecting on the need for additional tools, skills, and learning opportunities, one practitioner observed, "We are stuck in the model of inviting folks to come to 'community conversations' but they aren't really invited to meaningful involvement beyond that, and I think it really comes down to the tools. I have the sense that no one really knows what to do beyond that." Other practitioners likewise acknowledged that effectively engaging young people in social change requires staff to have a set of tools and skills above and beyond those required for traditional youth work, including

- the ability to create and facilitate curriculum that enables young people to see their individual lives in a broader social, political, and historical context;

- the ability to research and analyze issues, moving beyond an examination of the symptoms of social problems to an exploration of root causes and historical origins;

- the ability to develop a concrete and actionable change agenda, engage in power analysis, develop allies, and understand who has decision-making authority to deliver the change;

- and an understanding of organizing steps, tactics, and strategies that enable groups to move beyond raising awareness to take concrete action, particularly when facing resistance from those in positions of power. (As one practitioner explained, "Okay, we painted a street banner. Now what?")

When asked where staff and organization leaders could go to learn the skills they need, 44 percent of practitioners and intermediaries said they did not know, and 37 percent named a resource outside of Connecticut, suggesting that the state currently lacks the internal capacity building infrastructure to support the growth and development of robust youth-led social change efforts.

The scarcity of community organizing in Connecticut leaves young people—and the adult staff and organizations that support them—without local examples, models, success stories, and training opportunities.

When asked whether young people in their communities believed they had the power to create change, only 2 of 14 youth focus group participants said they did. When asked to explain, one youth noted, "Your surroundings affect your sense of power and ability to make change." Another youth said, "We are encouraged to move away or get out of our communities in order to become successful. Youth are told to leave the problems behind, rather than fix [them]." Another participant suggested that youth—and adults—are conditioned to accept injustice and inequity: "Youth grow up with problems all around them, so they learn to accept it. Adults adapt to their situations too, so they don't believe or expect that change can happen either."

Adult interviewees echoed youths' observations. When asked to reflect on why there was not a more vibrant youth-led social change field in Connecticut, several of these adults noted that the state has few well-resourced grassroots groups whose constituencies—those most directly impacted by the issues—were leading the charge. Although Connecticut's once-vibrant community organizing sector powered impressive victories in neighborhood revitalization, criminal justice reform, drug policy, and public safety, one veteran organizer described the current state of community organizing work in Connecticut as "dire." Other interviewees shared this view and provided numerous examples of how community organizing efforts in Connecticut have been gradually "de-funded," often prompting organizations to "retreat back into service delivery without any sort of complementary social change agenda focused on institutional or policy changes."

Youth-led social change efforts benefit from the existence of robust community-led social change efforts. "Social change," explained one interviewee, "cannot be learned through a manual or a guidebook. It must be experienced and learned through doing." The dearth of strong, well-established, and well-resourced organizing groups leaves youth-serving organizations without trained, experienced staff to help guide and support young people's efforts. As one youth worker pointed out, "If you're talking about wanting to develop a youth organizing project, pretty quickly you start asking where do you go to get this training? If adult organizing isn't happening, then that pool of resources is going to be more limited and smaller."

The weak infrastructure for grassroots-led change efforts also leaves young people and their adult allies without "exposure" to authentic, current examples that demonstrate that change is possible. They also do not have the benefit of learning firsthand how to make change happen. As one practitioner said, "There aren't very many models left for young people to look at and see an example of what others have done, and think 'we can do that too.'" Real-world exposure is particularly critical for addressing what some practitioners described as young people's "hopelessness" in the face of the injustices that

CHALLENGE #1
Insufficient Capacity

73% practitioners/ intermediaries

69% funders
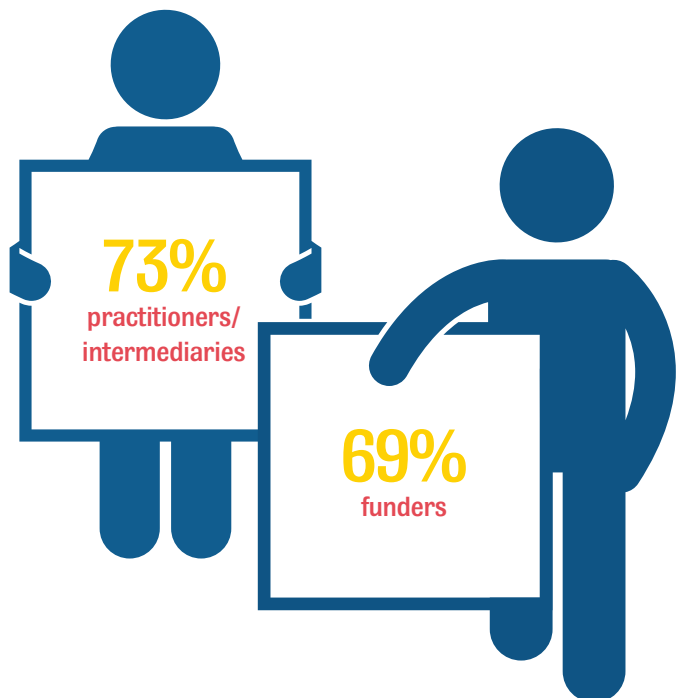
youth suffer. "If you don't know anybody or you have never actually seen adults or young people trying to make these changes," one youth worker explained, "then you are going to have less of an idea that it is possible."

Youth-led social change requires a culture shift in how youth and adults engage with each other.

Another frequently cited challenge was the pervasive culture of adultism—the assumption that adults "know better" than young people and so are entitled to make decisions for young people without their involvement.

Youth participants in the focus group believed that mainstream media and news outlets contribute to these attitudes by disproportionately reporting on issues that stereotypically portray young people, especially those in urban centers, in negative ways while ignoring the efforts and positive contributions young people are making to improve their own lives and communities. Youth in the field scan also noted that adults sometimes undermine youth leadership by dismissing their skills, abilities, or perspectives. Adults, one young person said, "think we don't know anything. They think we are 'just kids.'" Another explained that adults "forget they were young once too, and don't bother to understand what we are going through from our point of view." Youth focus group participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of adults' learning to "step back" and let go of some of their power, authority, and self-perceived expertise so that youth can more comfortably express themselves and have the room to learn and grow.

Practitioners agreed, noting that many adults—even those who specialize in youth development—struggle to "let go" and to permit young people to become decision makers. Another interviewee suggested that many believe youth simply are not capable of advocating for themselves: "People think that certain folks just can't advocate for themselves, and I think that is especially true of young people, and especially young people of color."

Interviewees underscored the importance of creating spaces in which young people and adults can learn from each other and benefit from the life experiences each group brings to the table. As one practitioner put it, "We do believe in youth having their own space

"We are encouraged to move away or get out of our communities in order to become successful. Youth are told to leave the problems behind, rather than fix [them]."

Youth leader, focus group participant

CHALLENGE #2
Adultism

67%
practitioners/
intermediaries

50%
funders
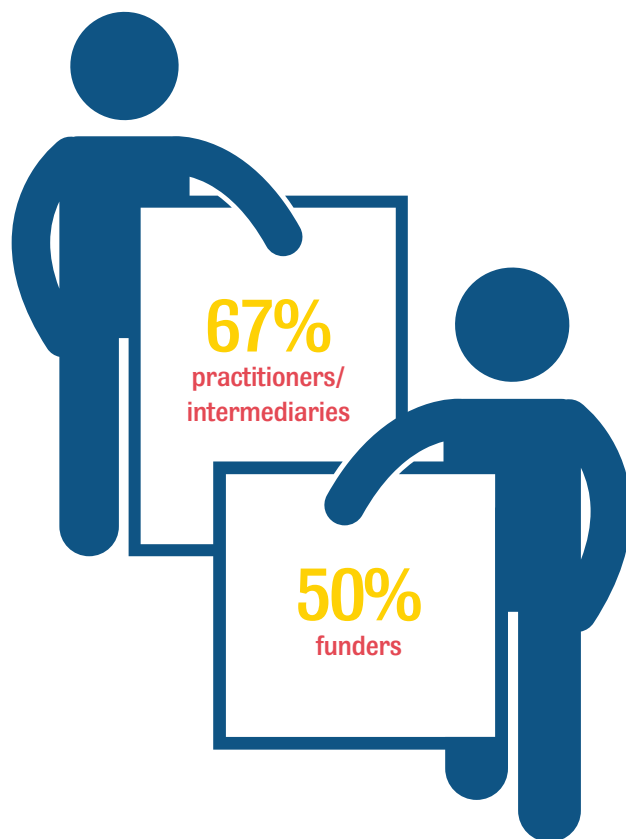
and voice, separate from adults, where adults don't impose, but adults should provide history, experience and guidance in terms of how to move things forward." A veteran community organizer noted that adults also benefit from genuine partnership with young people: "One big mistake of our movement ... is that we aren't integrating them at every level.... They need to be in the room with us."

Are youth "ready"?

While those in the youth focus group saw themselves as eager and capable leaders of change efforts, some practitioners interviewed questioned whether young people are "ready" to engage in social change efforts because of instability or challenges they may face in other areas of their lives. Adolescence is a tumultuous time in its own right. Can a young person effectively engage in and lead social change efforts if they are struggling in school, coping with family stress, seeing a therapist, or on probation or parole?

Research in the field of youth-led social change suggests that young people facing these challenges are not only able to effectively engage in community change efforts, but that youth organizing is a particularly effective vehicle for their growth and development. Youth organizing transforms adversity into an asset, and the individual and collective agency young people experience through organizing is a powerful antidote to the sense of powerlessness they may experience in other parts of their lives. As the youth organizing field has evolved and matured, organizations have intentionally expanded the core youth development supports offered to youth leaders, developing programs or building strategic partnerships that address young people's academic, legal, or health and wellness needs.

Can you accomplish real change in "youth time"?

Several practitioners noted that the duration of a young person's engagement in a social change organization does not always align with the length of time required to see a "victory" on a social change campaign. Can youth-led social change really deliver policy or systems reform in such a short time frame? What if a young person doesn't experience a "win"? How do you maintain focus on a campaign as youth leaders age out and move on?

The culture and best practices of the youth-led social change field include celebrating small wins and incremental victories, ensuring that youth reflect on and recognize their contributions and successes at every step along the way. Even the most established youth organizing groups have gone through learning curves and trajectories that have allowed them to scale up their campaigns to achieve major victories over time. What starts as an effort to improve bathroom conditions, for example, may over the course of several years build into an effort to expand equitable access to school resources and improve school climate.

Experienced youth organizing practitioners also point out that, regardless of the outcome of any specific campaign, young people build critical transferable leadership skills. Youth will bring a social change lens and toolkit with them to the next stage in their life. Effective youth organizing groups also dedicate intentional time and energy to documenting and sharing the history of their campaign efforts with new youth members, so newly engaged youth feel a sense of ownership and belonging to a broader effort. Finally, many well-established youth organizing groups intentionally transition youth leaders into intern or staff roles, and several youth organizing groups across the country are working to develop "leadership pipeline" initiatives that will connect current youth leaders to future social change leadership opportunities and careers.

Some cautioned that inviting young people "to the table" does not always translate to meaningful engagement. As one local funder observed, "Youth voice is the most lacking thing in our city, bar none. I think adults are so shortsighted about youth and their lives because ... the only time they are at the table is with token representation."

"We need a paradigm shift in how we approach youth work," one practitioner said. "We have to learn how to build the programs with youth at the table from the start. We need to stop building what we think youth need and start co-building. We need to be taught how to co-build and equally share what we create. That's the biggest challenge."

> "We need a paradigm shift in how we approach youth work. We have to learn how to build the programs with youth at the table from the start."
>
> Rev. Dancy, Executive Director, SAVE

Youth-led social change involves having "tough" conversations about race, class, equity, and justice—conversations that can be uncomfortable or perceived as risky and controversial.

Youth focus group participants observed that "real" conversations about equality, inequality, and racism seldom happen in their schools or communities. The scarcity of meaningful conversations around tough topics like racism is particularly concerning given that researchers have found that "civic and political engagement for youth of color is often mediated through experiences of racial inequality."[36]

Bringing about social change requires frank, honest, and real conversations about power, privilege, oppression, and justice. Practitioners interviewed during the course of the scan expressed anxiety and fear that participating in—and acting on—these conversations would compromise their funding or the relationships their organizations have with influential decision makers

and political figures. As one noted, Connecticut "is a pretty conservative place ... there is less and less and less room for communities to speak out, both from the city hall point of view and from the point of view of funders."

Financial and political pressures limit the scope, depth, and potential impact of youth-led social change. The prospective repercussions of "speaking out" create a dynamic in which nonprofit organizations can become, as one practitioner said, "more focused on our organizations surviving than on really seeing change happen." Some practitioners described the "fine line" they must walk between empowerment and fundraising, asking, "Where can we push the edges of the envelope and where can we not [upset] our mainstream funders?" Another described engaging youth in social change as "politically risky": "[What] if I want to maintain a good relationship with my mayor or city council person and they aren't on board with what we want to do or the stuff kids decide that they want to focus on?"

> "There are very limited organizations [in Connecticut] that actually give youth the opportunity to find their own issues and answer their own problems... that teach us to think bigger, to stand up for the issues that we face."
>
> —David White, Youth Leader, New Elm City Dream

Other practitioners acknowledged that the influential decision makers in the philanthropic and political sector are often closely linked, if not one and the same: "If you at some point start to challenge the school board, or superintendent, or even the curriculum within the high school, pretty quickly people are going to get angry, and those people who you've now angered are from the same pool as those who are on the boards of the local funding sources." These pressures create, in the words of one practitioner, "a ceiling" that stifles young people and limits the potential impact of their social change efforts.

There are incongruities between Connecticut's prevailing funding culture and practice and the funding approach necessary for supporting youth-led social change.

Funders spoke directly to the powerful individual, systemic, and societal implications of engaging young people in social change. The lack of investment in youth leadership for social change, noted one funder, "does a disservice to really helping young people establish who they are, what they represent, and the power they could bring to the change process. We've never put them in that position ... so when youth are in that position later in life, the vast majority are woefully ill prepared for that opportunity."

Nonetheless, the scarcity of youth-led social change groups in Connecticut must be understood in the context of scant philanthropic support for its unique approach. Scan participants highlighted concrete ways in which Connecticut's foundation culture and practice limit the development of strong, effective youth-led social change efforts.

1.
Connecticut does not have a foundation that champions the process of grassroots organizing for social change. Youth and community-led change efforts have not "flourished," one funder noted, in part because the state lacks an intentional and committed philanthropic anchor "that is going to support the work, bring about the information and best practices, and inform others." This absence of foundation leadership has left the philanthropic and nonprofit sector with few opportunities to learn about youth-led social change and with insufficient knowledge and resources to appropriately support it.

2.
Many foundations struggle to engage in grantmaking that extends beyond an individual or programmatic impact. One funder described the challenge of trying to get people to think broadly enough: "It's not just funding a program in your town that's going to make life different for your citizens. It's also changing policy that's affecting those people. How do you begin to get that bigger vision?" That bigger vision can be a "tough sell," one funder cautioned, particularly during times of economic downturn, when foundations with fewer resources are meeting increased demands to "maintain the critical services safety net" while demonstrating to their donors, boards, and trustees that they are having an impact.

CHALLENGE #3

57% practitioners/intermediaries   **56%** funders

identified a reluctance to have "uncomfortable" conversations as a challenge in advancing youth-led social change.

3.

Generating significant, deep, and lasting social change is a long-term process, which often conflicts with a foundation's desire and need to demonstrate immediate impact and swift results. Community and private foundations both face this challenge.
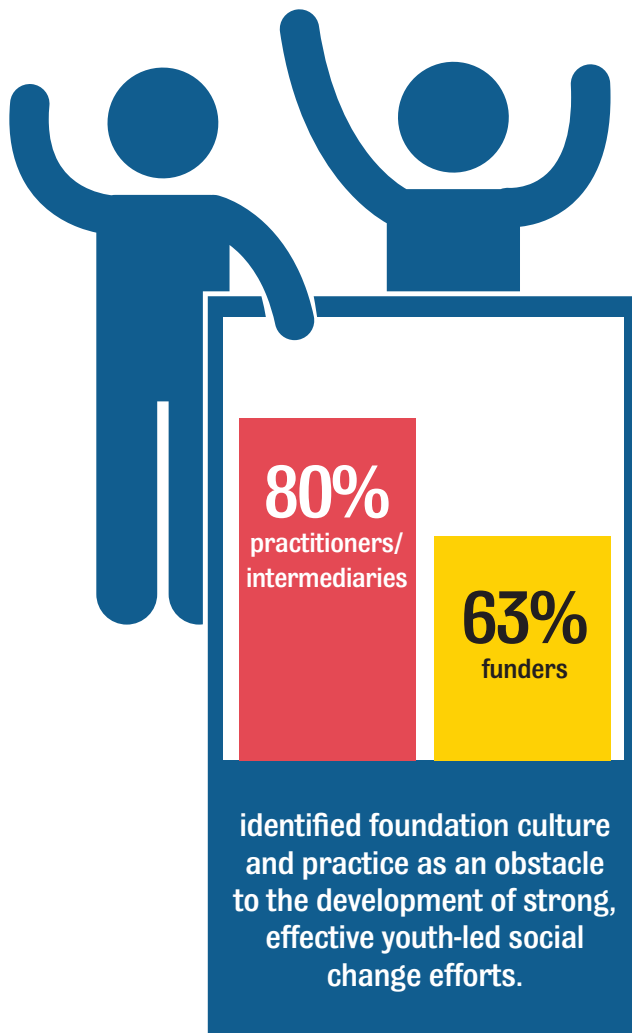
Much of the financial support for Connecticut's community-based organizations is drawn from the state's local community foundations and United Way affiliates, fundraising entities in their own right. As one funder explained, "These two institutions are both very dependent on donors, and they want to be able to tell their donors that they've used their money well. Social change has not been one of the things that's been easy to demonstrate. It's always been hard to evaluate organizing and advocacy and have people understand the value of supporting that kind of work."

Long-term, strategic social change initiatives can be a challenging undertaking for community foundations because they are accountable to the changing needs and interests of their donors and trustees. A funder at one community foundation pointed out that long-term "continuity" in strategy and initiatives is difficult to maintain when "the board changes every three years" or when prospective donors have new or different interests or priorities. "Foundations," another funder said, "suffer from FADD: Foundation Attention Deficit Disorder. Interests and trends come and go."

Private foundations, on the other hand, do have the latitude to develop long-range strategies focused on issues of equity. The desire to make an impact and see swift reform, however, can sometimes overshadow the time-intensive process of building the leadership and capacity of youth and community-based groups most directly impacted by decisions. One foundation described its strategic approach as predicated on an "ethos" of "we're going to do it with people, we're not going to do it to them and we're not going to do it for them," acknowledging that this approach was not typical of most foundations.

One funder acknowledged that it is "tough" to accommodate individual, organizational, and community capacity building processes because foundations themselves are often so compelled by the outcomes and change they seek to create. Another funder observed that foundations invoke the value of community voice and engagement, but translating these attributes into action requires time, flexibility, and new practices: "Are

CHALLENGE #4

80%
practitioners/
intermediaries

63%
funders

identified foundation culture and practice as an obstacle to the development of strong, effective youth-led social change efforts.

The lack of investment in youth leadership for social change, noted one funder, "does a disservice to really helping young people establish who they are, what they represent, and the power they could bring to the change process."

you willing to take longer? Are you willing to adjust your schedule? It's hard to grasp at the beginning that you are laying the groundwork for something much grander."

4.

The prevailing single-year, project-based approach to grantmaking prevents practitioners from articulating and implementing long-range change campaigns or strategies. Practitioners described the tension between time, process, capacity, and outcome as another obstacle to the support of youth-led social change efforts. One veteran organizer noted, "Funding agencies need to see A plus B equals C. Organizing doesn't happen like that. You don't see changes in the system in a short time frame.... We want to see immediate results, but this work takes time because you're changing the way things have been done for many, many years." Youth workers similarly pointed out that part of the reason existing youth-led social change efforts are not implemented with sufficient depth or long-term impact is that foundations offer one-year, project-based grants with expectations for measurable and tangible deliverables. As one explained, "You might get grant money to address an issue, but it's a short period of time and once you really get going, the grant has ended."

5.

The philanthropic sector's own struggles— to relinquish control, have "uncomfortable" conversations, and build authentic relationships with community members directly affected by their funding decisions—adversely affect social change efforts. "One funder, when asked to critique Connecticut's philanthropic sector, explained, "we create strategies without including the people who are affected by the strategies." Although all of the funders interviewed underscored the importance of learning to work as "partners," they also acknowledged that this approach is "not the norm," primarily because the philanthropic sector is reluctant to have the "messy" conversations about power, privilege, and inequity. One funder interviewed posed the difficult questions:

Who is not benefitting from our system? Who is actually being harmed? That's messy. People don't want to talk about that. It's not polite. Philanthropy is very white in Connecticut and when we talk about young people, the first thing that comes to my mind is inner-city youth that are not getting equal education compared to their suburban peers. It's been happening for too long and it's uncomfortable to talk about it because there are race, class, and ethnicity issues. And if you're not comfortable with it, do you want to go in that space?

> Youth focus group participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of adults' learning to "step back" and let go of some of their power, authority, and self-perceived expertise....

Another funder noted, "You really have to go with the 'apple pie' issue. It's about who you do not want to offend, who you do not want to alienate. It's risky." Just as nonprofits do not want to upset their funders, foundations do not want to alienate their donors or trustees.

Supporting youth and community-led social change is also perceived as a "risk" because it requires foundations to surrender a degree of power and control. "You can have a vision," one funder noted, "but you can't have the end result. You've got to let [that] come. If you are really going to do it, you have to listen to the community." This shift does not come easily, another reflected, because "most funders just make decisions all by themselves and don't have to necessarily collaborate with others. It's very hard to give up power, and give power to a group."

Noting that foundations are sometimes more interested in "making their own voice heard" than in "empowering people," one funder pointed out that foundations sometimes "espouse values that are not reflected in their actions." Another funder reflected on her foundation's struggle to engage with its community in a way that listens deeply and follows through: "What's missing is conversation with real people. How do you have conversations with real people, how do you engage them in this work? The other important thing is to close the loop. People don't expect you to do everything they suggest, but they do expect you to come back and say, 'Thank you. I heard you, and this is what came out of it.' Often we just walk away and don't come back."

The challenges identified here are significant, but they are far from insurmountable. The next section of this report highlights opportunities that make Connecticut ripe for change and also identifies the steps that could be taken to advance youth-led social change efforts in our state.

"We're going to do it *with* people, we're not going to do it *to* them and we're not going to do it *for* them..."

Opportunities Ahead

INTERVIEWEES' CANDID DISCUSSION of the challenges Connecticut faces must not be misinterpreted as reluctance or disinterest in youth-led social change. The common refrain that youth-led social change in Connecticut is "not happening enough," reveals that people believe there should be more effort to support it. When asked, everyone had ideas as to how the youth-led social change field could be strengthened.

"We need opportunities to discuss these issues with youth organizations and their constituents," one funder said. "We know youth are important, and youth issues are important. The concept of youth-led change got my attention because it does stand out from traditional service provision.... It hasn't been a large enough part of the general conversation around youth work."

Three factors make Connecticut well positioned to begin that conversation now:

1.

The Benefit of Well-Established Models: Although youth-led social change is still very much a nascent field in Connecticut, it is not a nascent field nationally. As noted previously, FCYO's national field scan has identified more than 180 youth-led social change groups throughout the country. Connecticut has the unique advantage of being able to benefit from more than two decades' worth of knowledge gained in the field. These practitioners have developed effective models, documented best practices, and gathered research-based evidence of the ways in which youth-led social change is transforming the lives of young people and addressing the systemic issues they face.

Foundations across the country—from large national funders like Atlantic Philanthropies to statewide foundations like the California Endowment and smaller family foundations like Hill-Snowden—have made successful investments in youth-led social change. As a result, they have valuable insights, experiences, and lessons to share that stand to benefit Connecticut philanthropy.

2.

A Shifting Philanthrophic Mind-Set: Although much of the state's charitable grantmaking remains programmatic and focused on service provision, Nancy Roberts, Executive Director of the Connecticut Council on Philanthropy, noted that Connecticut foundations are increasingly cognizant that "a simple grant to an organization isn't going to bring about community change."

According to Roberts, in the past seven years, there has been a real shift in terms of funders' understanding of their role in policy. "We've tried to move funders to understand that they can help their towns if they change this policy on the state level," she explained. "Not everybody is there, but there are more there than ever before." As funders begin to take a more active role in resourcing policy reform and systems change, vibrant youth-led social change efforts will be critical. Because youth-led social change efforts are driven by the perspective and personal experiences of those directly affected by prevailing policy and institutional practice, youth leaders bring to the table a unique and powerful voice for change. They also offer the opportunity for fresh and innovative approaches to deeply entrenched problems.

3.

Shared Understanding of Challenges: The results of the field scan indicate that there is a strong alignment between practitioners' and funders' assessments of the challenges facing the field. There is also a strong alignment in their ideas for strategies to address those challenges. This shared understanding represents, in itself, a vital opportunity for Connecticut. Even if practitioners and funders have not yet been in conversation with each other about the obstacles, they will be able to begin that conversation with shared understanding and common ground.

> Peer-to-peer learning models and cohort-based learning communities reduce the sense of isolation and the sense of competition that often prevents nonprofits from working collaboratively.

The Next Steps

With these opportunities in mind, this final section of the report draws from interviews and focus groups to outline steps that could strengthen and deepen youth-led social change in Connecticut.

Expand the prevailing youth development framework and build connections between youth development organizations and social change efforts.

Connecticut's nonprofit sector has a long and well-established history of operating positive youth development programs. Nearly every community foundation in the state has a grantmaking area focused on youth development, and many of the state's private foundations also dedicate resources to supporting the positive growth and development of Connecticut youth. This report underscores the importance of supporting youth-led social change and draws attention to the lack of infrastructure and support in this field, but not every youth development organization can—or should—become a youth-led social change group. There, are, however, ways in which existing youth development agencies can contribute to youth-led social change.

First, youth development agencies—and those that fund them—can prioritize engagement of youth voice and foster youth-adult partnerships, create meaningful opportunities for shared decision making, and incorporate sociopolitical competency as a core youth development outcome. These shifts will enhance young people's overall development by empowering young people to understand their own life experiences in the broader social and political context in which they exist. This exposure is particularly important during adolescence, as youth develop their identities and begin to formulate answers to tough questions: Who am I? What do I care about? What is fair? Which community or communities do I belong to? How do I view the world and why do others see it differently? What do I want to change? What role can I play? Creating opportunities for youth to question the status quo, to think critically, and to become confident in decision-making roles helps pave the way for youth to become informed and engaged community members.

Second, youth development agencies can work in partnership with others to create opportunities for youth to contribute to social change efforts. Without taking on a full-fledged social change agenda, these agencies can participate in networks, coalitions, and alliances and build intentional relationships with existing social change groups to expand leadership opportunities for youth. Youth development agencies do this when, for example, state budget cuts threaten their organizational survival. It is equally possible for these organizations to participate in collaborative, coalition-based efforts that challenge injustices in young people's lives and communities. Foundations can support this shift by resourcing coalitions and alliances and encouraging youth leadership within them.

Co-create learning spaces and invest in infrastructure that will build knowledge and capacity for youth-led social change.

The inchoate state of youth-led social change in Connecticut, as one interviewee put it, "is a skill issue, not a will issue." As noted in the findings, there was a resounding call for capacity building support from groups who want tools and skills to engage their young people in social change efforts. In the state of Connecticut, where youth programs tend to center around youth development and direct services, moving interested groups along the spectrum of engagement will require a deep commitment to capacity building for organizations and to field building within the state. This commitment could include these efforts:

- Identify, cultivate, and support qualified intermediaries and technical assistance providers that can help incubate the local infrastructure necessary for training, leadership development, and movement building strategies. This effort includes training youth and staff in the basics of community organizing and implementation of strategic campaigns. It is critical to ensure that these intermediaries also have a strong understanding of holistic youth development and have a sensitivity to working with youth, especially low-income youth of color, who have been historically and systematically excluded from decision-making processes.

- Provide opportunities for out-of-state learning so that Connecticut groups can take advantage of national expertise and learn from organizations that have a strong track record in engaging young people in social change. This effort may include site visits, learning tours, and peer exchanges to established youth-organizing groups in the Northeast.

- Support peer-to-peer learning models and cohort-based learning communities. Practitioners interviewed in the field scan underscored the importance of being able to drive their own learning agendas and of engaging in learning through relationship building with others in the field. This approach to capacity building reduces the sense of isolation and the sense of competition that often prevents nonprofits from working collaboratively. When a funder provides a grant to an organization, the funder expects that the grantee will use the grant to advance its individual mission. When a funder provides a set of grants to a cohort of grantees, it has a new expectation: that the grantees advance their own missions and also come together around a shared goal. The Gates Foundation, FCYO, and the Cricket Island Foundation, for example, have offered models of cohort-based grantmaking and capacity building initiatives that have resulted in increased trust, collaboration, and, in some instances, new coalitions to advance shared social change goals.

"We are in a place where we have to redefine what a movement is— what a change movement looks like. I think that organizing among youth for me is an opportunity… it's an opportunity to create a new model—a new change movement model."

—Frances Padilla, Universal Health Care Foundation

Build understanding and break down boundaries between funders, practitioners, and youth through relationship building, shared risk taking, and reciprocal learning.

The term "youth-led social change" remains unfamiliar to many practitioners and funders. Although interviewees in this scan embraced the approach, few were able to provide examples in their own work of instances in which young people have led social change efforts that address the root causes and result in long-standing impacts. For local funders, this lack of evidence presents a challenge. How do you support an emerging field, or area of work, that has yet to provide local evidence that it is effective?

Part of the answer to that question lies in building relationships. The field scan marked, for many of the young people and practitioners interviewed, the first time a funder had asked them for their opinions and perspective. By spending time getting to know current or prospective grantees, funders interested in learning more about youth-led social change gain firsthand knowledge of the value that these groups have in their communities, the roles that these organizations can play in the lives of young people, and the changes young people seek to create. As one funder remarked, in order to get past concerns about risk, "funders need to get on the ground and just listen to what's happening. It should be an honest dialogue." Another noted that foundations must "take the time to build relationships with those you are trying to affect and recognize that those relationships are reciprocal because they affect you." Getting to know the people— not just the staff— within an organization and gaining an understanding of their vision of themselves and their communities will help illuminate the importance of engaging young people in changing the systems that are failing them.

Meaningful dialogue and exchange between funders, youth, and community members will help funders better understand the strategic decisions that shape youth and community-led social change processes. One practitioner acknowledged that relationship building is important for helping funders realize that effective youth and community organizing requires "deep thought" and "is not just a bunch of people running around carrying posters." One funder interviewed noted that the process of "challenging assumptions"—a key component of

social change efforts—can be a tool for relationship building. In its recent report about the impact of organizing efforts on education reform, the Nellie Mae Foundation called "attention to relationship building" critical in order for funders "to trust in the longer-term process an organization must go through in creating a space for itself in a policy-making venue."[37]

Both funders and practitioners expressed frustration over the inadequacy of the evaluation tools available to describe and measure the impact of social change efforts. Meaningful relationship building between foundations and practitioners could create new opportunities to rethink and redesign traditional evaluation mechanisms. Many practitioners and funders are unaware of the promising new tools and approaches to evaluating social change. In the past several years, for example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Center for Evaluation Innovation, and the California Endowment have advanced frameworks for evaluating advocacy and policy, organizing, and building social change movements.[38]

Commit to a long-term process.

Multiyear funding is critical to the success of any group that engages in social change work. It allows grantees to engage their communities in critically assessing what is best for their communities and how to prioritize issues and campaigns. As discussed previously, policy change and community change takes time. In order to flourish, youth-led social change groups must have support that enables them to break out of the mold of short-term, episodic action projects. Multiyear funding eases some of the pressure on groups to apply or reapply for grants each year. It also allows the group the flexibility to articulate a longer-term vision. Youth-led social change efforts that have benefited from multiyear foundation support have achieved impressive campaign victories.

Practitioners interested in deepening and sustaining their social change work must also commit to a long-term process. They must work intentionally to develop organizational structures and mechanisms that cultivate youth leadership over a sustained period of time (rather than in cyclical increments), ensure that experienced youth play an active role in developing new youth leaders, and enable youth to document, celebrate, and share the history of their organizing efforts.

Invest in nascent efforts and grassroots leadership.

Several of the organizations that participated in this field scan are volunteer-coordinated efforts without full-time staff. Although they are interested in growing and deepening their work, they have at times struggled to gain access to the funding and resources they need to do so. Some are structured differently from traditional nonprofits or lack the "credentials" or "polish" that foundations look for when making funding decisions. Foundations may not value the assets of these groups—committed and visionary leadership with deep knowledge of local realities, long-standing ties and commitment to the communities in which they exist, direct experience with the issues they seek to change—in the same way they value a highly connected board or a sophisticated strategic plan. As the National Council on Responsive Philanthropy notes,

Foundations seeking to affect broad-scale change frequently look for organizations that appear to offer significant capacity or prestige, and more often than not invest in larger, elite institutions.... These organizations are not always as connected to grassroots groups that often can better represent and communicate the voices of those closest to the problems at hand.... This imbalance in philanthropic giving often reflects and reinforces disparities of race, gender and class that mark our society.[39]

Investing in grassroots youth-led social groups will generate change efforts that have more impact, build enduring civic capacity, and help support communities in sustaining and regenerating their own indigenous leadership.

> "Funders need to get on the ground and just listen to what's happening. It should be an honest dialogue."
>
> Anthony Alison, Program Officer, Norwalk Children's Foundation

A New Role

Creating equitable access to resources and opportunities for all of Connecticut's youth requires honest, deep, and thorough analysis and also requires action to challenge and change the status quo. Efforts to build safer, healthier, and more equitable communities will fall short if young people are not at the table.

Preparing young people for the future means honoring, valuing, and supporting their community leadership and engagement today. Youth-led social change—when fully actualized—has transformed the lives of young people and communities across the country. It has the potential to do the same in Connecticut. The sincere interest in youth-led social change uncovered during the course of this scan is not yet matched by Connecticut's on-the-ground staff and organizational capacity, infrastructure, and philanthropic resources necessary to realize its full potential. This circumstance, too, can change. The well-being of our young people—and the civic health of our state—demand it.

> Preparing young people for the future means honoring, valuing and supporting their community leadership and engagement today.

Notes

1. Data Across States, KIDS COUNT Data Center, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, accessed November 16, 2012, http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?ind=7288.

2. Wade Gibson and Sara Kauffman, *Pulling Apart: Connecticut Income Inequality 1977 to Present* (New Haven, Conn.: Connecticut Voices for Children, 2012), http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/econ12pullingapart.pdf.

3. "Using U.S. census data to compare the proportions of White, Black, and Hispanic residents in metro-area neighborhoods, Connecticut's scores indicate a moderately-high level of racial segregation. In fact, segregation of Blacks in each of the three Connecticut metro areas is higher than that of Atlanta; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Little Rock, Arkansas." Judith Carroll, *Opportunity in Connecticut: The Impact of Race, Poverty and Education on Family Economic Success* (Hartford, Conn.: Connecticut Association of Human Services, 2012), 4.

4. *Biennial Report on Disproportionate Minority Contact* (Hartford, Conn.: State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, 2011), http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/cjppd/cjjjyd/juststart/DMCBiennialReport123111.pdf.

5. *Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach* (Middletown, Conn.: State Education Resource Center, 2011), 3.

6. Valeriano Ramos Jr. and Nancy Thomas, *2011 Connecticut Civic Health Index* (East Hartford, Conn.: Everyday Democracy, Office of the Secretary of State of Connecticut, National Conference on Citizenship, 2011), 7.

7. Ibid., 24.

8. Roderick Watts and Constance Flanagan, "Pushing the Envelope on Youth Civic Engagement," *Journal of Community Psychology* 5, no 6. (2007): 786.

9. Shawn Ginwright, *Building a Pipeline for Justice: Understanding Youth Organizing and the Leadership Pipeline* (New York: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2010), 6.

10. Surbhi Godsay, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Abby Kiesa, and Peter Levine, *That's Not Democracy: How Out of School Youth Engage in Civic Life and What Stands in Their Way* (Medford, Mass.: Center for Information and Research on Civic Engagement and Learning, 2012), 6, 15.

11. *Estimated Populations in Connecticut as of July 1, 2011*, State of Connecticut Department of Public Health, accessed March 14, 2013, http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hisr/hcqsar/population/pdf/pop_towns2011.pdf.

12. *Quick Facts About Philanthropy in Connecticut*, Connecticut Council on Philanthropy, accessed March 14, 2013, http://www.ctphilanthropy.org/s_ccp/bin.asp?CID=20650&DID=16922&DOC=FILE.PDF.

13. Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski, *Real Results: Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice Philanthropy* (Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2013), 13.

14. Ibid., 4.

15. Kay E. Sherwood and Julie Dressner, *Youth Organizing: A New Generation of Youth Activism* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Public/Private Ventures, 2004).

16. Daniel HoSang, *Youth and Community Organizing Today* (New York: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2003), 3.

17. Shawn Ginwright, *Youth Organizing Expanding Possibilities for Youth Development* (New York: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2003), 3–4.

18. Ibid., 5.

19. LISTEN, Inc., *An Emerging Model for Working with Youth: Youth Development + Community Organizing = Youth Organizing* (New York: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2003), 9.

20. Ibid.,10.

21. *The Power of Transformative Youth Leadership: A Field Analysis of Youth Organizing in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: The Heinz Endowments, 2012), 12.

22. LISTEN, *An Emerging Model for Working with Youth*, 9.

23. *2013 Youth Organizing Field Scan* (New York: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, forthcoming).

24. Shephard Zeldin, Julie Petrokubi, and Linda Camino, *Youth Adult Partnerships in Public Action: Principles, Organizational Culture, and Outcomes* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Center for Nonprofits and the Forum for Youth Investment, 2008), 8–9, 20–24.

25. Heather Lewis-Charp, Hanh Cao Yu, Sengouvanh Soukamneuth, and Johanna Lacoe. *Extending the Reach of Youth Development through Civic Activism: Research Results from the Youth Leadership Development Initiative* (Takoma Park, Md.: Innovation Center for Youth and Community Development, 2003), 115.

26. Roderick Watts and Constance Flanagan, "Pushing the Envelope on Youth Civic Engagement": 781.

27. Shawn Ginwright, Youth Organizing *Expanding Possibilities for Youth Development*, 15.

28. Roderick Watts and Constance Flanagan, "Pushing the Envelope on Youth Civic Engagement": 784.

29. Ibid., 787.

30. Shawn Ginwright, *Building a Pipeline for Justice: Understanding Youth Organizing and the Leadership Pipeline*, 5–7.

31. Surbhi Godsay, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Abby Kiesa, and Peter Levine, *That's Not Democracy*, 15.

32. Seema Shah, *Building Transformative Youth Leadership: Data on the Impact of Youth Organizing* (New York: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2011), 20–23.

33. *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders* (Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, 2010), 3.

34. *Youth Voices as a Strategy for Systems Change: An Evaluation of the Zellerbach Family Foundation Youth Voice Initiative* (San Francisco, Calif.: Zellerbach Family Foundation. 2011), 9.

35. M. Renee and S. McAlister, *The Strengths and Challenges of Community Organizing as an Education Reform Strategy: What the Research Says*, Community Organizing as an Education Reform Strategy Series (Quincy, Mass.: Nellie Mae Education Foundation, 2011), 7, 13.

36. Shawn Ginwright, *Building a Pipeline for Justice: Understanding Youth Organizing and the Leadership Pipeline*, 6.

37. M. Renee and S. McAlister, *The Strengths and Challenges of Community Organizing as an Education Reform Strategy*, 22.

38. Barbara Masters and Torie Osborn, "Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building," *The Foundation Review* 2, no. 2: 23–26; Catherine Crystal Foster and Justin Louie, *Grassroots Action and Learning for Social Change: Evaluating Community Organizing* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2010); Jane Reisman, Anne Gienapp, and Sarah Stochowiak, *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* (Baltimore, Md.: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007).

39. Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski, *Real Results: Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice Philanthropy*, 11.

Methodology

Three central research questions guided the field scan:

1. How and to what extent are young people in Connecticut engaged in social change efforts?
2. What are the opportunities and challenges for strengthening the field of youth-led social change work in Connecticut?
3. What must happen in order to build the regional infrastructure that will support youth-led social change efforts?

The data and findings in this report are drawn from three sources of information:

1. A review of literature pertaining to best practices and evidence-based impacts of youth engagement and youth organizing
2. In-depth interviews with 46 practitioners, funders, and intermediaries, which were recorded and then analyzed for common themes
3. Focus groups with youth, practitioners, and intermediaries to deepen analysis of the themes that emerged from interviews

The following criteria guided the initial selection of scan interview participants. We sought the participation of the following:

• Youth-serving organizations known to be operating programs that support youth voice and/or actively engage youth in social change efforts
• Established community organizing groups, networks, or intermediaries that can offer perspective and insights about the climate and context for youth-led social change efforts in Connecticut
• Nascent grassroots groups or community-based efforts that are not incorporated as nonprofits but are nonetheless engaged in community change work

In addition, we sought participants' suggestions for additional interviews in order to ensure that we were engaging groups or efforts that might otherwise be unfamiliar to us. Finally, we intentionally made efforts to ensure that participants reflected the geographic and demographic diversity of our state.

This report focuses primarily on the engagement opportunities within the nonprofit sector. It does not explore youth engagement in institutional or municipal structures such as student government, city or municipal youth councils, or state departments and institutions associated with youth advisory groups.

Glossary

Adultism
The assumption that adults "know better" than young people and are entitled to make decisions for young people without their involvement.

Advocacy
Efforts that seek to educate, inform, and create change or reform in public policy and practice. Although advocates may be in contact with those affected by the problem they seek to address, advocacy efforts do not necessarily involve those impacted in the process of addressing the issue.

Civic Engagement
Individuals' overall level of participation in community life and local affairs, as measured by community and political acts, such as voting, volunteering, and belonging to groups or organizations. Engagement includes identifying and understanding problems in the community and also includes developing skills, knowledge, networks, relationships, and feelings of purpose and meaning. (*See also* Youth Civic Engagement.)

Civic Health
The degree to which diverse groups of citizens are able to work well together and with government to solve public problems and strengthen their communities.

Community Organizing
A process that builds the collective power of individuals to challenge the status quo and make the changes they want to see in their communities. Community organizing seeks to alter relationships of power by ensuring that those directly affected by social problems are creating solutions that lead to lasting structural and institutional change.

Grassroots
The emphasis on building local power by developing indigenous leadership and promoting genuine participation and democracy in organizations, based on the values, principles, and traditions of a given community (as in grassroots organizing, grassroots-led efforts, grassroots groups). The grassroots-organizing sector remains the source of innovative methods of leadership development and youth organizing.

Intermediaries
Nonprofit organizations that provide products, services, training, or expertise that strengthens the knowledge, skills, or collaborative efforts of other nonprofits and/or the sector.

Opportunity Structure
The organizational settings and roles that provide meaningful and desirable opportunities for action in the community. Within the context of youth-led social change, organizations provide opportunity structures to young people through political education, leadership development training, direct action, etc.

Practitioners
For the purpose of this report, those individuals who facilitate and support the personal, social, and educational development of young people (directly or indirectly) to enable them to gain voice, influence, and place in society.

Root Causes
The underlying factors that create community problems and make those problems likely to persist even though services may be in place to help individuals and families meet their immediate needs.

Service Provision
The offering of services and programs designed to meet individuals' basic and immediate needs, such as food, housing, counseling, tutoring, and safe after-school activities. Service provision does not address the root causes of social issues, and the people whose needs are being met are generally engaged as clients and recipients. (*See also* Youth Service Provision.)

Social Change
Any work or analysis that addresses the root causes of oppression and promotes fairness, equality, equity, and sustainability.

Social Justice
The use of collective democratic action to create just, equitable, and sustainable conditions for all members of society.

Tokenism
The practice of making a perfunctory or superficial gesture toward the inclusion of members of under-represented or historically excluded groups. A token effort is usually intended to create a false appearance of inclusiveness and deflect accusations of exclusivity and discrimination.

Youth Civic Engagement
Young people's development of the skills and habits needed to actively shape democratic society in collaboration with others; emphasis is placed on engaging youth in a democratic process, both within the organization and within the broader community. (*See also* Civic Engagement.)

Youth Development
A structured process through which young people build the skills and competencies that are essential for their successful transition into adulthood. Principles of youth development include: safety and structure, belonging and membership, opportunities for independence and control, meaningful relationships, identity development, and self-awareness. Youth development requires that young people have stable places, services, and instruction. It also requires supportive relationships and networks that provide nurturing, standards, guidance, and opportunities to try new roles and contribute to family and community.

Youth-Led Social Change
A long-term process that builds young people's confidence, knowledge, skills, and collective leadership in order to address the root causes of injustice and inequity in their lives and communities.

Youth Organizing
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 identify issues that are relevant to them, analyze those issues, and design and implement solutions.

Youth Service Provision
Treatment and support provided to young people to address the problems they encounter. The service approach defines young people as clients, and the work strives to intervene in a young person's life to confront personal problems. (*See also* Service Provision.)

Youth Sociopolitical Development
The development of youth's evolving, critical understanding of the political, economic, cultural, and other systemic forces that shape society and one's status in it.

Youth Voice
The ideas, opinions, experiences, attitudes, and knowledge of young people, which, when sought and valued by society and engaged in decision-making opportunities, can promote youth leadership and have a positive impact on community.

Field Scan Participants

Youth Leaders

Sophia Dzialo

Julie Garay

Leroy Garcia

Mark Ifill Haney

Marcus Hooks

Tomar Joseph

Erica Lockhart

Chelsea Martin

Adina McCray

Alex Miranda

Edwin Rodriquez

Edwin Serrata

Ilana Smith

Cheyenne Williams

Funders
* Indicates former staff member

Annie E. Casey Foundation
Yolanda Caldera Durant*

Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
Sarah Fabish

Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut
Jennifer O'Brien

Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut
Heather Dinneen

Connecticut Community Foundation
Josh Carey

Connecticut Council on Philanthropy
Nancy Roberts*

Empower New Haven
Kia Levey*

Fairfield County Community Foundation
Dorcas Blue*

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Maria Mojica

Norwalk Children's Foundation
Anthony Allison

Tow Foundation
Diane Sierpina

United Way of Western Connecticut
Kimberly Morgan and Isabel Almedia

Universal Health Care Foundation
Frances Padilla and Lynne Ide

William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund
David Nee and Angela Frusciante

William Graustein and Fahd Vahidy

Zoom Foundation
Meghan Lowney

Practitioners and Intermediaries
* Indicates former staff member

Breakthru! / Speak Life!
Sheeva Williams Nelson and Josh Williams

Bridgeport Parent Leadership Training Institute
Donna Thompson Bennett*

Carver Foundation of Norwalk
Novelette Peterkin

Center for Youth Leadership
Bob Kocienda

Citywide Youth Coalition
Rachel Heerema

Connecticut After School Network
Michelle Doucette Cunningham

Connecticut Center for a New Economy
Renae Reese

Connecticut College, Education Department
Dana Wright

Excel Bridgeport
Maria Zambrano and Lauren Wozniak

FRESH New London
Arthur Lerner and Mirna Martinez

Grapevine Foundation for the Advancement of Adolescents and Young Adults
Regina Roundtree

Greater Bridgeport Latino Network
Eileen Lopez-Cordone and Lissette Andino

Hartford Communities That Care
Andrew Woods

Hartford Food Systems
Martha Page

Hearing Youth Voices
Laura Burfoot

Institute for Community Research
Jean Schensul and Heather Mosher

My Brother's Keeper
Barbara Fair

National Conference for Community and Justice
Andrea Kandel and L. A. McCrae

New Elm City Dream
David White and Lisa Bergman

RYASAP / Youth Inc.
Paige Nelson

Serving All Vessels Equally
Albert Ray Dancy

Solar Youth
Joanne Sciulli

Teach Our Children / Youth Unleashed
Camelle Scott Mujahid

True Colors
Robin McHaelen

United Connecticut Action for Neighborhoods
Alta Lash

University of Connecticut, Office of Community Outreach
Gina DeVivo Brassaw

Voices of Women of Color / Organizing Leadership Academy
Janice Flemming

Waterbury Youth Service System
Caryn Olcik

Youth Development Training and Resource Center
Deborah Stewart

Youth Rights Media
Janis Astor del Valle

ABOUT THE PERRIN FAMILY FOUNDATION

The Perrin Family Foundation (PFF) is working to make Connecticut a state where young people are vital leaders in creating safe, healthy, and just communities. PFF partners with organizations based in under-resourced communities across Connecticut in order to create environments that support youth as leaders of social change.

ABOUT THE FUNDERS' COLLABORATIVE ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) unites national, regional, and local grantmakers and youth organizing practitioners dedicated to advancing youth organizing as a strategy for youth development and social transformation. FCYO's mission is to cultivate resources for young people taking action to build healthy and equitable communities. Since its inception, FCYO has focused on building the philanthropic, intellectual, and social capital necessary to strengthen and grow youth organizing.

Copies of this report are available in PDF format at www.perrinfoundation.org.