YOUTH IN DECISION-MAKING

A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations

Shepherd Zeldin
Annette Kusgen McDaniel
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University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department of Human Development and Family Studies
University of Wisconsin Extension

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Introduction

The field of positive youth development has built a solid foundation of theory, program, and research, and is now focusing on implementation and sustainability. The current challenge is to clearly articulate best practices and to bring them to scale, while seeking to demonstrate effectiveness and accountability. Central to these efforts is the movement to include the voice, ideas, and experiences of young people at the tables where important decisions are made.

This movement's philosophy is hardly new. Twenty-six years ago, for example, the National Commission on Resources for Youth described the goals of youth participation in ways that are highly consistent with those discussed today.

Youth participation can thus be defined as involving youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with the opportunity for planning and/or decision-making affecting others.... There is mutuality in teaching and learning (between youth and adults) and where each age group sees itself as a resource for the other and offers what it uniquely can provide.[1]

Beginning with the successful effort to reduce the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen years in the late 1960s and continuing through the establishment of policies that support community service, service learning, and youth leadership, much progress has been made towards engaging youth in building healthy communities for themselves and for others. Yet social change is always slow and incremental, and there are many barriers to overcome. Policy advocates know there is much more to be done.

The current emphasis is on infusing young people into all levels of organizational decision-making. What makes this priority quite different from those of the past is that advocates are pushing for youth to be directly involved in the deliberation and enactment of organizational policy. Young people, these advocates say, need to be involved not only in day-to-day programming decisions, but they should also be involved in organizational governance. It is only through this "infusion" that communities will be able to promote the development of all youth and adults.

Rationale for This Research

Over time, marked discontinuity has emerged in the United States between what we expect from youth and what we expect from adults. Moreover, adolescents remain marginalized in community decision-making processes, and are infrequently invited to engage in collective problem-solving. This isolation creates social contexts where negative stereotypes may flourish, and results in few opportunities for youth and adults to work in partnership. Further, these contexts and stereotypes are sustained by policies that assume young people are unable or unwilling to contribute to the common good.

The past decade has witnessed an impressive array of models that integrate youth more fully into the decision-making processes of organizations, collaborations, and public institutions. Unfortunately, research has not kept pace with the advances of practice. Although it is clear that bringing youth to the table can have powerful, positive impacts on young people, there is no research to address its effects on adults,

organizations, and communities. The current project addresses this gap.

The lack of research is important, for research has been instrumental to the success of many movements in human services. Of course, there is no substitute for advocacy, demonstrating good practice, and key events in historical time; rarely does one study or set of studies make the difference when it comes to reforming policy. But research provides a foundation of support for social change. It can serve three basic purposes for those advocating for greater youth involvement in decision-making.

1. Research can address accountability concerns. It can empirically substantiate best practices and provide additional substance to practitioner wisdom. It offers a test of current assumptions and raises new issues.

2. Research can propel dissemination processes. Unfortunately, relatively few youth are engaged in civic participation and a small minority of organizations engages youth in governance roles. Research-based materials can add clarity and definition to those who wish to involve youth but who do not know where or how to begin the work in their own communities.

3. Research-based knowledge offers a different type of legitimacy than practitioner knowledge. Combined, the two can offer the most convincing message. Research knowledge is often written. It is easily accessed when information is needed for advocacy or fund-raising purposes.

Study Questions and Method

Slowly, more organizations are involving youth. Two estimates are available. First, the National Center for Nonprofit Boards claims that 3 percent of nonprofit board members are under the age of twenty-nine.[2] However, this estimate does not reflect youth governance roles outside the board of directors. Second, a study by the Princeton Survey Research finds that about half of all nonprofit organizations are involving young people (age fifteen to twenty-nine) in decision-making and leadership roles. The vast majority of these organizations do not involve youth in governance roles.[3] It is noteworthy that in both studies "young people" are defined as those as old as twenty-nine years of age.

Without question, involving young people in decision-making promotes positive adolescent development. But as we began this research we wondered if such involvement really had broader impacts on adults and organizations. Although we hoped so, we had some skepticism. Thus, this study explored questions that we asked in exploring our own skepticism.

• Does youth governance lead to additional changes that improve conditions for young people not directly involved in decision-making processes?

• Does involving young people in decision-making have positive influences on adults?

• Does it help adults become stronger allies with youth? And youth with adults?

• Does it contribute to organizational effectiveness, creating organizations that are better able to meet the developmental needs and concerns of adolescents?

For this study, we sought to achieve a rich diversity of organizations and decision-makers. An intentional sample of nineteen youth and twenty-nine adults from fifteen organizations across the country participated. Eight organizations had young people on their

boards of directors for a minimum of two years. Seven comparison organizations had strong histories involving youth in program decision-making, but not at the board level.

Data were collected through individual and focus group interviews. Our analysis strategy was the extended case method. In an iterative fashion, this method identifies practice-based theories of the field and systematically compares them with findings generated from the current study and with knowledge gleaned from previous research.

A Brief Note on Language

There is little agreement among advocates about language describing youth involvement in decision-making in organizations, institutions, and coalitions. The following definitions represent our best understanding of the consensus that exists in the field, and we use them in the report.

Youth infusion refers to the fundamental goal: to integrate youth and young adults into all spheres of community life and to ensure that their voice and action are valued and utilized in efforts aimed at social or community change. At the organizational level, an institution is "infused" when youth are valued as effective partners and when structures are created at multiple levels to ensure that the voice of young people is represented in decision-making.

Youth governance (or **youth decision-making**) is a fundamental and core strategy of youth infusion. It refers to those situations where youth work—often in partnership with adults—to set the overall policy direction of organizations, institutions, and coalitions. Youth decisions may be administrative (e.g. hiring staff, designing programs, or conducting needs assessments) or operational (e.g., leading youth groups or training volunteers.)

These terms often refer to young people working on boards of directors, sanctioned committees, planning bodies, and advisory groups.

Most organizations define youth and young people as people between the ages of twelve and twenty-one. We use these age parameters as well.

1

Overall Findings and Conclusions

On the basis of this study, we conclude that young people can have powerful and positive effects on adults and organizations. It does not happen all of the time, of course. Sometimes, young people are not fully prepared or motivated to exert a strong influence on others. Sometimes adults are not responsive to the contributions of youth or try to exert too much control over decision-making processes. Sometimes organizations are not ready to create ways for youth and adults to work together. But when the right conditions are in place, involving youth in decision-making is a powerful strategy for positive change.

As seen in Figure 1, our inquiry focuses on three levels. First, we present the contributions that youth and adults make to organizational decision-making and the synergy that arises from this interaction (A through C below). Then, we identify the outcomes that arise from joint decision-making (D through G). Finally our analysis focuses on the conditions that are necessary for positive change (H).

Findings: Processes of Change

Organizational effectiveness is a collective concept. It arises from the interplay of contributions made by diverse persons, including youth and adults. Synergy comes from difference and for this reason our analysis focuses on the differences between what youth and adults bring to decision-making.

Building from the information gained in this study, it becomes possible to construct a theory for how youth governance contributes to positive adult and organizational outcomes.

This theory, presented in Figure 1, offers a means for presenting our overall findings and conclusions. It offers a lens for identifying key leverage points for implementing best practices and achieving desired positive outcomes.

(A) Youth Contributions

Young people can be exemplary members of governance bodies, and their contributions may increase with age due to cognitive maturity and accumulated experience. There is a good fit between their stage of development and organizational needs. During adolescence, many young people are driven to explore issues of social justice. They are creating and experimenting with their own principles and political ideas, leading many to become involved in cause-based action. Consequently, in many organizations, the young people become the keepers of the vision. They are the ones who focus on the mission.

Don Floyd, CEO of National 4-H Council, says adding youth members to the Board of Trustees enabled a move from a traditional board structure to one that focused on "issues, development, learning, and agenda setting."

Young people often speak their minds and bring a fresh perspective to organizational decision-making. We heard adults comment on how young people change the content and quality of discourse and procedure on governing boards, commissions, and other planning bodies. But adolescence is also a time for deepening relationships and intimacy with peers. Young people bring a first-hand knowledge of youth—their interests,

Figure 1.

Theoretical Framework: Youth and Adult Decision-Makers
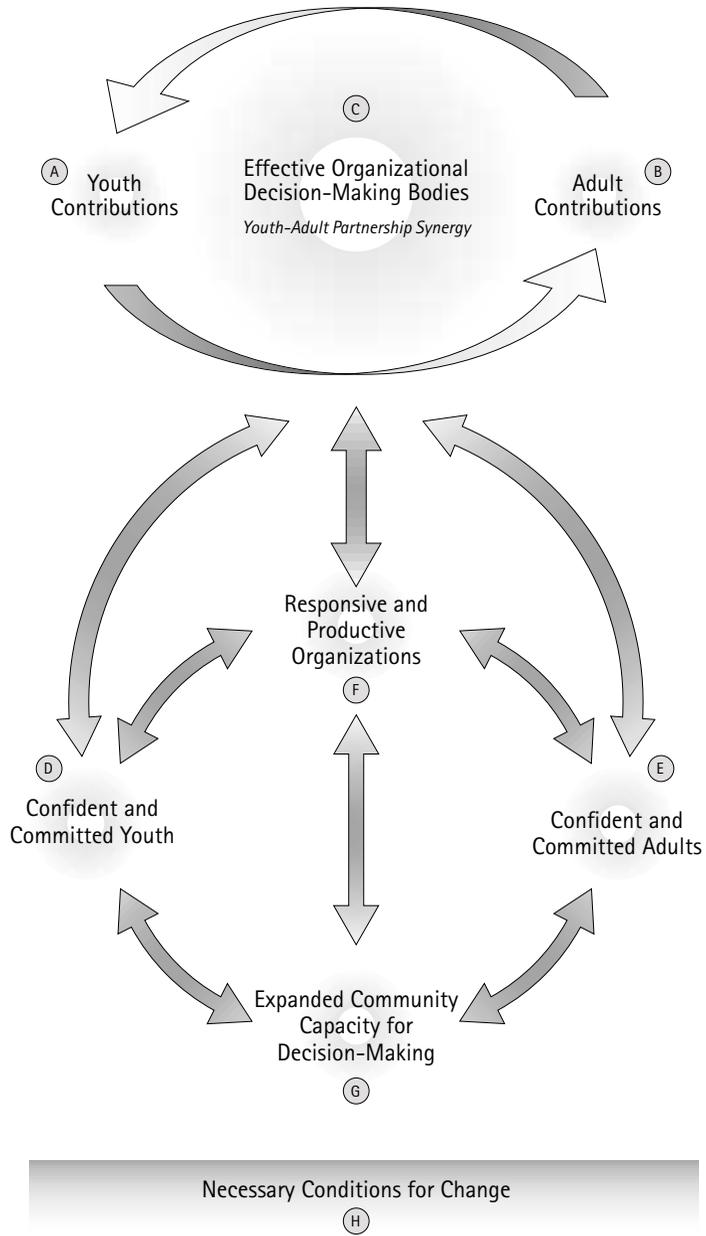
concerns, fears, passions—that simply is not accessible to adults. They bring connections to other young people and can leverage the participation and skill of their peers.

(B) Adult Contributions

Adults can also be exemplary members of governance bodies, especially when they are prepared and motivated to work collaboratively with young people. Adulthood is a time of generativity, a time to pass on one's knowledge and skill to the next generation. Feelings of community and connection again take on greater importance as adults reach mid-life. We were not surprised to find that the young people and adults in this study most often used words such as guidance and support when describing the contributions of adults. Young people especially value the lessons adults bring from other organizations; they often seek out the advice, instruction, and direction that adults can offer.

"By learning through adult experience, we're standing on the shoulders of giants," says Gabriel Saunkeah, youth decision-maker at the United Methodist Youth Organization.

Many adults have institutional power that is not accessible to young people. With this power comes access and connections to a fuller range of human, community, and financial resources. Adults bring these resources to young people and the collective governance body. By virtue of years of work experience, adults also bring a range of administrative and programming skills to the table. They can create organizational infrastructures for administration and programming. Such structure allows youth to concentrate their expertise, interest, and time on the more mission-driven

and action-oriented aspects of the organization.

(C) Synergy: Youth-Adult Partnerships for Effective Decision-Making

The mutual contributions of youth and adults can result in a synergy, a new power and energy that propels decision-making groups to greater innovation and productivity. We discovered that in this atmosphere youth and adults become more committed to attending meetings and create a climate that is grounded in honest appraisal, reflection, and ongoing learning.

Galen Phipps, Looking Glass Station 7 Director, described the synergy between youth and adults. "Having youth involved in decision-making changes the adult staff role from parental authority figure to partner. It improves staff performance. Through that change, youth and adults are able to join around a common goal. This is much different from the traditional adult role of telling kids what to do.... Youth embrace this autonomy and freedom to influence the organization."

This synergy stems from the good fit between youth and adults who are in different stages of their lives, and therefore have different interests, skills, and experiences to bring to the table. Organizational decision-making provides the venue for meeting the developmental needs of both adults and youth. Young people need the structure and mentoring that effective adults can provide. Adults find satisfaction in passing on their knowledge and experience to the next generation.

When the group is functioning well, these differences merge into a whole, for they are complementary. The organization profits as a result.

Findings: Positive Outcomes

From this study, we can conclude that involving youth in decision-making has positive benefits. These benefits are analyzed fully throughout the report and summarized below.

(D) Youth Outcomes

This study did not explore the effects of decision-making on the youth themselves. This issue has been studied in the past, and results are conclusively positive. Involving young people in decision-making provides them with the essential opportunities and supports (i.e. challenge, relevancy, voice, cause-based action, skill-building, adult structure, and affirmation) that are consistently shown to help young people achieve mastery, compassion, and health.[4]

It is exactly these developmental opportunities and supports that (should) characterize shared decision-making between youth and adults in organizations. In the organizations that we studied, the young people prospered when decision-making had these qualities.

(E) Adult Outcomes

Most of the adults we interviewed had never worked collaboratively with youth for a common goal over an extended period of time. This study demonstrates that adults benefit from working with youth in four primary ways.

1. Adults experienced the competence of youth first-hand, and began to perceive young people as legitimate, crucial contributors to organizational decision-making processes.

2. Working with youth served to enhance the commitment and energy of adults to the organization.

3. Adults felt more effective and more confident in working with and relating to youth.

4. Adults came to understand the needs and concerns of youth, and became more attuned to programming issues, making them more likely to reach outside the organization and share their new knowledge and insights. They gained a stronger sense of community connectedness.

(F) Organizational Outcomes

Involving youth in decision-making helps change organizations for the better. Six positive outcomes were identified.

1. The principles and practices of youth involvement became embedded within the organizational culture.

2. Most organizations found that young people help clarify and bring focus to the organization's mission, and some organizations made this a formal role of youth.

3. The adults and the organizations as a whole became more connected and responsive to youth in the community. This investment and energy led to programming improvements.

4. Organizations placed a greater value on inclusivity and representation. They came to see that their programming benefits when multiple and diverse community voices are included in decision-making processes.

5. Having youth as decision-makers helped convince foundations and other funding agencies that the organization was serious about promoting youth development.

6. Including youth in decision-making led organizations to reach out to the communi-

ty in more diverse ways (e.g. community advocacy, policy-making, and service.)

(G) Community Outcomes

In this study we did not consistently identify community-level outcomes that could be attributable to youth and adults making decisions together. This was due to two factors. First, the vast majority of organizations in this study had not engaged young people in decision-making roles for extended periods of time—typically, less than three or four years. They were still focused internally, learning how to make the organizational shifts necessary to support youth governance and were not looking out into the community. Second, expanding community capacity means that a variety of organizations and agencies have to involve young people in decision-making. This has not yet happened.

Community capacity outcomes probably will not become readily detectable until young people are infused in decision-making contexts across multiple organizations and agencies. As more organizations adopt youth governance into their operating philosophy in the future, a critical mass of expertise will grow. Eventually communities will experience a cultural shift. In our study, only Hampton, Virginia, can be categorized as a place where "youth infusion" is moving into the public mainstream. Cindy Carlson, Hampton Coalition for Youth Director, noted that Hampton has developed a community culture that supports youth governance and says, "You can't do something around here without asking for youth input."

Findings: (H) Creating Conditions for Organizational Change

We stress that these processes and positive outcomes do not occur naturally, and are not in the repertoire of most organizations and communities. There are many reasons why young people are rarely involved in organizational decision-making, ranging from cultural stereotypes to the lack of supporting policies and structures.

Nonetheless, the organizations in this study were successful in bringing the voices and ideas of young people to the governance table. As expected, some organizations were far more effective in this regard than others. Our research identifies the following conditions as being most likely to facilitate positive outcomes:

1. The top decision-making body in the organization needs to be committed to youth governance and youth-adult partnerships, and must change their ways of operating accordingly. The data are clear: If a governance body is focused on vision and learning, there is room for young people to make substantial contributions. If it is more traditionally focused on rule making and management, then it is less likely that young people will have a significant influence on the board.

2. Organizational change is facilitated by an adult visionary leader, one with institutional power and authority, to strongly advocate for youth decision-making. Without this leadership, traditional management structures and stereotypic views about young people are too powerful to overcome.

3. While an adult most often leads the initial change processes, the movement takes on greater power and influence as young peo-

ple begin to organize and demand increasing participation in governance.

4. Adult views about young people are difficult to change, and this is true even for adults in governance positions. Change occurs when the organization offers three types of experiences to adults.

   a) Adults perceived a good reason to work with youth. The governance work had to be purposefully oriented towards meaningful outcomes. Adult attitudes did not change when the decision-making was perceived as symbolic or tokenistic.

   b) Adult attitude change occurs most readily when young people perform well in the boardroom, or in other places that adults regard as adults' turf. It is important for adults to witness youth succeeding in the nuts and bolts of organizational improvement.

   c) Adults change their views of young people when they have the opportunity to observe youth engaged in community action that had real payoffs for community residents.

5. Organizational change occurs most rapidly when adults perceive the young people as effective decision-makers. For this reason, the young people who were nominated to take on key governance roles were selected carefully, just as the adults were. Most of the organizations had created a kind of scaffolding for youth to work their way up through the organization, engaging in a variety of leadership-building and decision-making opportunities.

6. According to developmental research, organizations begin the change process by first involving older youth in governance roles. Age matters. A fourteen-year-old dif-

fers significantly from an eighteen- or nineteen-year-old across multiple domains (cognitive, physical, societal, psychological, economic, and legal). The organizations in this study recognize this difference. While decision-makers ranged in age from twelve to twenty-three, the majority fell between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. The mean age of those whom the organizations chose to be their spokespersons for this study was eighteen years. It seems that the organization, in their desire to ensure the early success of youth governance, have decided to begin with older youth and to eventually integrate younger adolescents into governance.

Next Steps for Practice and Research

Involving young people in organizational governance represents one of the most innovative strategies for promoting youth and community development. Unfortunately, adult attitudes and current organizational structures are not set up to support youth and adult partnerships in decision-making. The organizations in this study were working hard to overcome the barriers and to explore the potential of this strategy. Our data indicate that organizations can achieve an impressive array of positive outcomes when they make youth and adult partnerships an operational priority.

Throughout this study, we were impressed with the degree of consistency across highly diverse organizations. People on the East Coast had similar experiences to those who lived in the Midwest or on the West Coast. The lessons learned by those in rural areas were not much different from those gained in urban neighborhoods. Moreover, the findings in this study were

consistent with past research and evaluation.

Currently, however, only a small percentage of organizations involve young people in decision-making. Social movements occur incrementally and over a long period of time. There is much more work to be done and important discussions to be had among those who advocate for youth in governance. We offer two issues for consideration by practitioners. First, it will be important for the field to struggle with the issues of organizational practice that emanate from age considerations. It will be important for the field to identify the most appropriate roles for all young people of differing ages. In this study, for example, the organizations turned to older youth at the beginning of their organizations' transformational processes.

Second, this research indicates that almost all of the young people who were engaged in governance roles were experienced in organizations. They came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, but the commonality was that they all had a history of being participants and volunteers in community organizations. They had much to bring to organizational decision-making by the time they were nominated for governance roles. It is clear that the organizations chose the most qualified persons, both youth and adult, based on their skill, commitment, and connections. It will be important for the field to create options for decision-making—at all levels within the organization—to ensure that the greatest number of the most diverse young people can participate and gain the knowledge and skills necessary to take on organizational governance roles.

This study is the first to explore the effects of youth in decision-making on adults and organizations. More research is necessary. We offer three directions. First, descriptive information is important. For example, we know little about the number of organizations that legitimately involve youth in governance roles and just as little about who participates and what they do within organizations. Second, it will be important to test our data and the findings to see if generalizations based on them can be made. This study should be replicated through different methodologies.

Most importantly, we urge researchers to explore "youth infusion" in addition to governance. Our impression from this research was that those organizations that involved youth at all levels of decision-making (e.g., hiring staff, being on advisory committees, leading project teams, working as support staff) were most likely to achieve positive outcomes. Simply having one or more youth on the "highest" governance body is not enough. In the future, "infused" organizations should be the focus of research. If we can identify the antecedents to infused organizations and the positive outcomes that arise from them, research will best be able to support the movement towards engaging youth as decision-makers.

2

Study Purposes and Methods

Little research exists to address important questions regarding youth in decision-making roles. A strong case—supported by research—can be made that involving youth in decision-making is good for young people's development. There are, however, almost no studies that explore how adults benefit when involved in shared decision-making with young people. Even less research studies the effects of youth participation on organizational decision-making, board or commission deliberations, or community change processes. This study was designed to address those gaps.

Study Purposes

This study sought information and perspective about youth in decision-making roles. The research was designed for four purposes:

1. To discover if the presence of youth in decision-making roles has any positive effects on adults and organizations.

2. To identify the conditions and processes through which young people have positive outcomes on adults and organizations.

3. To identify salient issues and opportunities facing those who involve youth in organizational decision-making.

4. To construct a theoretical framework which can guide future programming and research.

Sample Selection and Research Methods

Overall, nineteen youth and twenty-nine adults from fifteen organizations across the country participated in this study through personal interviews. The organizations were selected to achieve diversity in geographic location (see Figure 2). Additionally, we facilitated two focus groups in San Francisco, CA, and Washington, DC. Through this method, we gained data from youth and staff from sixteen additional organizations.

Figure 2
Site Locations

Selection of Organizations

Our aim was to explore and capture a broad range of perspectives on the issue of youth infusion by a diverse group of people who were engaged in the work. Given the limited amount of research in this area, we believed that there was much more to learn from organizations where youth were infused in decision-making, as compared to those where young people were not involved.

A list of prospective organizations was generated through a nomination process. First, a meeting was in held in Chevy Chase, MD, with a design team organized by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development. (For a list of design team participants, see pg. iii.) Design team participants offered nominations of places and organizations that had a strong reputation for youth infusion. Second, a call was put out on a listserve that included people engaged in the youth movement. Finally, additional names were solicited through the researchers' and project sponsors' professional networks.

To narrow the list, we employed a maximum variation sampling approach to achieve a diversity of organizations and organizational decision-makers.[5] We sought to include organizations that had youth on their board of directors, as well as those that engaged young people at other levels of the organization. We looked for organizations that served different youth populations (e.g. urban, rural, homeless, sexual minority) as well as organizations that had a strong community, policy, or advocacy emphasis. Those chosen for the study were personally recruited. All except one asked to participate agreed to play a part. No one was paid for his or her participation.

Our intentional sample was composed of two types of organizations (see Table 1). The first set of organizations selected (N = 8) were those in which young people sat on the boards of directors or in comparable roles (i.e., groups with a significant impact on the overall governance of the organization). All of these organizations had youth on boards for at least a two-year period. The second set of organizations (N = 7) had strong histories of youth infusion in decision-making (e.g., as advisory board members, youth staff, peer educators, or program planning committee members) but did not have youth on their boards. All but one were considering adding youth board members.

Focus Groups

In the District of Columbia and San Francisco, we conducted focus group discussions about youth governance issues. The focus groups included representatives of organizations that were interviewed personally during site visits and sixteen organizations that did not participate in the site visits. These focus groups gave us a chance to explore study issues by letting participants respond to one another in a structured format. Overall, 46 people were involved in the focus groups.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews with youth and adults at eight of the organizations were done during site visits to Washington, DC, Eugene, OR, and San Francisco, CA. Interviews with stakeholders at the remaining organizations were done by phone.

Over 80 percent of the interviews (forty of forty-eight) were conducted by two members of the research team. One person took the lead in conducting the interview while the other took notes. Within one day, the two persons conducting the interview came together to complete the notes, which were then written up as a source of data.

Data collection occurred in two phases. For the first half of the interviews conducted, our primary focus was on exploring the range of outcomes that might be attributed to youth involvement in decision-making. From these empirical data, analyses were conducted to identify patterns in the perceptions and practices of those interviewed. For the second phase of the study, our focus shifted to identifying the organizational practices that contributed to positive outcomes.

We used the extended case method as our analysis strategy.[6] This method bolsters empirical data with the researchers' previous knowledge as well as knowledge gleaned from existing literature. We began by testing the practice-based theories of the field and comparing them with findings generated from our research. Additionally, we integrated the organizational context of each interview into the analysis. Thus, the analysis is based not only on the individual accounts and experiences of respondents but is also anchored in existing theory and research.

We also used the strategy of informant checks to analyze and verify our data. A draft version of the study was sent to all participating organizations. Adults and youth were asked to identify (a) errors of fact and of quotation, and (b) errors of interpretation. Additionally, youth-adult pairs from a few organizations were asked to provide a written response to be included in the final report. (See Appendix A for a sample response.)

Use of Existing Literature

There are few studies that look at the positive influences young people have on adults, organizations, or communities. The same cultural influences that have resulted in youth being excluded from organizational decision-making have also resulted in youth being overlooked by researchers as agents of adult or organizational development. Thus, our task of reviewing literature relevant to youth infusion was difficult.

Fortunately, the literature that does exist is extremely valuable in other ways. It offers much insight into the conditions through which adult development and organizational change occurs. It provides a strong socio-historical context for understanding the movement to involve young people in decision-making, with clear implications for the challenges and opportunities the movement will face in the future. Moreover, it also provides insight into adolescent development and how young people contribute to adult and organizational change.

Throughout this report, we integrate findings from the literature with findings from the current study. Our hope is that this format will best present the full range of information that is available on this topic and maximize the accessibility of the information so that it can be used by researchers and advocates alike.

Table 1

Organization Profiles

Organization	Youth Board Governance	Youth Infusion
Center for Youth as Resources Washington, DC	• 6 youth board members (ages 16 to 21)	• Part-time youth staff • Youth interns • Youth trainers • Youth conference presenters
Hampton Coalition for Youth Hampton, VA	• 20-member city Youth Commission (ages 14 to 18) • 5 additional city boards/commissions with youth members	• City Planners (paid youth staff) • Superintendent's Advisory Group • Principal's Advisory Group • Teen Advisory Group to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board • All neighborhood planning efforts involve youth • Youth interns • Youth trainers
National 4–H Council Chevy Chase, MD	• 10 youth on 45-member board of directors (ages 12 to 22)	• Youth interns • Youth staff • Youth involved in program design and implementation • Youth conference presenters • Youth project assistants • Youth trainers • Youth tour guides
Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League Washington, DC	• 5 youth on 15-member board of directors (ages 16 to 23)	• Youth involved in community outreach • Youth Council (advises youth board members)
Looking Glass Station 7 Eugene, OR	• 1 youth on 16-member board of directors (age 18)	• Youth advisory board • Youth peer counselors • Youth involved in program design and implementation
United Methodist Youth Organization Nashville, TN	• Youth dominated administrative board—20 youth and 10 adults (ages 12 to 18)	• Youth decision-making doesn't extend much beyond the board

Table 1, continued
Organization Profiles

Organization	Youth Board Governance	Youth Infusion
Wisconsin 4–H Foundation Madison, WI	• 3 youth on 20-member board of directors (ages 17 to 21)	• Youth infused throughout Wisconsin 4-H system, but 4-H Foundation involvement is limited to the board
Youth Leadership Institute San Francisco, CA	• 3 members under age 25 on board of directors	• Youth staff • Youth involved in program design and implementation • Youth theatrical educators • Youth workshop facilitators • Youth interns • Youth advisory board to the Marin County Board of Supervisors
Bethel/West Eugene Teen Courts Eugene, OR	No youth board governance	• Youth run court (youth serve as jurors, clerks, bailiffs, defendant advisors, and case presenters) • Youth member on staff hiring committee • Youth conference presenters
Center for Young Women's Development San Francisco, CA	No youth board governance	• Entire staff composed of youth— adults only present on board of directors
Federal Hocking High School Stewart, OH	No youth board governance	• Student Council with administrative power • Youth members on all-school committees • Student staff-hiring committee • Student initiated clubs • Student input in classroom decisions

Table 1, continued
Organization Profiles

Organization	Youth Board Governance	Youth Infusion
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network New York, NY	No youth board governance	• Youth input into programming efforts • Youth organized to push for board representation
Huckleberry Youth Programs San Francisco, CA	No youth board governance	• Peer health educators • Minimal input into program design
Turner Youth Development Initiative Bozeman, MT	No youth board governance	• Program development, implementation, & marketing • Radio show hosts • Staff hiring
Y–Press Indianapolis, IN	No youth board governance	• Staff composed primarily of youth, including youth reporters and youth editors • Youth involved in staff hiring • Youth involved in programming and implementation

3

Origins of Youth-Adult Isolation

The ability to engage in community decision-making is often seen as a requirement for adult membership in U.S. society, but the route is problematic. There is marked discontinuity between what we expect of adolescents and what we expect of adults.[7] Moreover, adolescents operate on the fringes of adult community life and only occasionally are they engaged in collective problem solving or action.[8] Youth governance needs to be viewed in a socio-historical perspective in order to understand the current challenges and opportunities facing those who seek to infuse young people into decision-making settings.

The Rise of Fear-Based Policies

Youth were not always isolated from adults. In colonial America, few young people received any formal schooling, and instead worked with their own family, usually on a farm, or took an apprenticeship in town with tradesmen to develop skills. An adult taking on an apprentice took responsibility for the education and socialization of the child. In this way, young people were integrated into family and economic life.[9]

During the second half of the nineteenth century, industrialization changed the societal position of youth. First it replaced the labor economy that had relied on the contributions of children and apprentices. Second, it led to urbanization. High-density living, which created more visible "immoral" behaviors such as drinking, sexuality, and vagrancy, resulted in a societal belief that young people had to be protected from potential dangers. Finally, industrialization required a new set of skills for workers to be successful in the marketplace.

In response, reformers enacted child labor laws and created the public school system. Gathering nearly all of the young people together for the first time created a new type of intergenerational isolation that had not existed before.[10] Although child labor laws and compulsory schooling have protected many vulnerable youth and educated those who may not have had the opportunity, the reforms had some negative consequences. Foremost among these, many young people became isolated from day-to-day supportive contact with adults and from community life outside of school. Young people became viewed as "different" and something to fear. Because of urbanization, racism, and segregation, these trends affected minority populations disproportionately. Some speculate that these reform movements have contributed to the widespread unemployment among young people, particularly African-Americans, that exists today.[11]

In 1905, G. Stanley Hall published a book entitled *Adolescence, its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education.* Its title alone gives an idea of the importance and danger associated with this stage of life. Social institutions were created to meet the needs of this newly isolated generation of young people, including juvenile courts, reform schools, and clubs. These programs often emphasized group activities and civic education with military overtones. By 1930, clubs and gangs of youth

were considered social organizations. The goal of youth workers, following the biological models of the times, was to turn these natural gang instincts into more socially productive functions, through development of organizations such as Boy Scouts.[12] Sociologist August Hollingshead interpreted these programs as efforts to "segregate adolescents from the real world that adults know and function in. By trying to keep the maturing child ignorant of this world of conflict and contradictions, adults think they are keeping him pure." [13]

The focus on the pathology and danger of adolescents has had a long shelf life. Throughout the 1900s, many policy-makers and advocates continued to view young adolescence as a time for youth to develop, experiment with adult roles, and begin to make life decisions. But the prevailing view was to search for solutions for young people in upheaval.[14] This fear and youth-adult isolation has continued, despite temporary shifts arising from changing employment and social conditions.[15] Fear and isolation is now embedded into the western economic system. "The short answer to why Americans harbor so many misbegotten fears," Writes Barry Glassner, "is that immense power and money await those who tap into our moral insecurities."[16]

The 1990s saw the expansion and consolidation of the lessons learned from prevention and other risk-oriented models.[17] The net consequence was a reconceptualization of adolescence that can be traced back to the romantic views of the early century, which came to be labeled positive youth development. The approach focuses not on pathology, but rather on health, development, and community. This approach views youth empowerment and exploration, competence and mastery, emotional health, compassion and generosity, community connections and belonging, and

civic participation as indicators of positive youth development and serve as the goals of youth and community work.[18]

Despite these favorable shifts, ample evidence indicates that adults in the United States hold negative views of adolescents–views that remain unsupported by research data.[19] But like all belief systems, stereotypes about young people are powerful in their impact by serving to define and set parameters for the goals, hopes, fears, potentials, and dangers in raising the next generation.

Ethnographic research across 186 societies leads to the conclusion that adolescents in the US, more than other countries, operate on the fringes of adult life.[20] Young people remain especially isolated with regard to responsibilities in community decision-making and action. Only occasionally do adolescents regularly interact with adults other than family or kin outside of educational or occupational settings. Prolonging their dependency and segregating young people from the adult decision-making world contributes to and sustains stereotypes, resentment, and suspicion.[21]

Adult Confidence in Youth as Community Decision-Makers

Societal stereotypes find their manifestation in adult attitudes toward youth as community and organizational decision-makers. Over the last few years, Shepherd Zeldin and his colleagues have conducted surveys in Wisconsin and Washington, DC, to understand the ways that adults perceive youth and community, with particular attention to the ways that adults perceive youth as community decision-makers.[27] Table 2 presents data illustrating the finding that a majority of adults perceive fellow adults as being isolated from young people in their own communities.

As part of the same research, adults were asked to identify their "level of confidence" in

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Adult Attitudes Toward Youth in the United States

"Storm and stress" is the dominant cultural metaphor for adolescence.[22] Researcher Bradford Brown observed that adults have a false image of a monolithic youth culture, one that portrays young people as being alienated from adult value systems.[23] Adults view adolescence as a turbulent period of life, characterized by conflict with parents, rebellion, mood disruptions, and frequent risk-taking behavior.[24] In one study, college students and parents generated a range of descriptors of adolescents. 78 percent of the categories were negative.[25] When asked to identify a phrase that best characterizes young people, almost three-quarters of the general public describe teens in negative terms. Only 14 percent of adults report that it is very common to come across friendly, helpful, and respectful young people. When asked if today's children will make America a better place in the future, only 38 percent agree.[26]

youth engaging in community decision-making and action. The results are presented in Table 3. The data show clearly that a greater percent of adults have "little or no" confidence in youth as compared to those who have "a lot" of confidence in youth as effective decision-makers. This pattern is consistent across Wisconsin and Washington, DC, adults.

For the Wisconsin sample, three additional questions were asked. These questions were designed to assess adults' confidence in youth to serve in "governance" or "voting" capacities of organizations. The data are also presented in

Table 3. A pattern emerges: as the decision-making role becomes more formal or has higher stakes for the collective community, adults have less confidence in youth.

In sum, adults do not view youth as effective decision-makers. Thus, it is not surprising that organizations do not typically create such roles and responsibilities for young people. But the problem is even deeper. Many adults believe that youth cannot or do not care to contribute substantially to the processes of decision-making and indeed may hinder it.

Table 2

Adults' Feelings of Isolation from Youth

Percentage of adults who strongly agree with the following statements	Washington, DC	Wisconsin
Adults care about teens in my community	18	20
Adults are in touch with the attitudes and feelings of youth in my community	6	3
Adults are good role models for teens in my community	N/A	9

Table 3

Adults' Confidence in Youth as Community Decision-Makers

Percentage of adults who think youth can perform the following roles	*A Lot of Confidence*	*Some Confidence*	*Little or No Confidence*
Speak to groups about dangers of drugs and alcohol	WI 29 DC 27	46 18	25 55
Mentor other youth	WI 26 DC 20	52 24	22 56
Represent community to city council	WI 21 DC 22	46 20	33 48
Serve as voting member of neighborhood association	WI 15 DC 20	51 19	33 61
Organize a community service project	WI 26 DC 16	47 22	27 12
Manage and oversee a fund-raiser	WI 19 DC 15	49 22	32 61
Serve as voting member of school board	WI 17	45	38
Serve as paid, part-time consultant to neighborhood organization	WI 14	50	36
Serve on board of directors of community development organization	WI 10	44	45

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Consequences of Negative Stereotypes on Adolescent Development

A body of research is emerging to indicate that cultural stereotypes negatively affect adolescents on a daily basis. To illustrate, parents consistently underestimate the ability of their children to reach certain developmental milestones as early as the literature suggests they might.[28] Negative adult stereotypes and low expectations for young people have been found to have broad influences. Stereotypes negatively impact parenting practices;[29] teaching practices;[30] the diagnoses and interventions of mental health professionals;[31] and the diminishing relationships and effectiveness of youth workers, educators, and mentors.[32] In contrast, research and evaluation indicate that when adults counter prevailing stereotypes and view young people as resources to be developed (and back this up with legitimate opportunities and supports for active participation, challenge, and leadership), young people prosper.[33]

4

The Contributions of Youth and Adults to Organizational Decision-Making

Organizational effectiveness is never a function of one individual. Answering the question, "What are the positive effects of youth governance?" demands that we ask what adults bring as well. Effectiveness arises from the interplay and synergy between youth and adults.

In this chapter, we highlight the different contributions that youth and adults make to decision-making bodies, as identified by those we interviewed. Although there are commonalties, the synergy comes from the differences, and thus we will focus on these.

What do Youth Bring to Effective Decision-Making?

Youth bring a variety of developmental and social characteristics to decision-making that enhance board and organizational effectiveness. Indeed, our analysis indicates that there is a good fit between the social concerns and developmental needs of young people and the decision-making needs of organizations. As discussed below, it is this fit that contributes to the skill and motivation of youth to spend their time helping to strengthen youth and community-oriented organizations.

Youth Bring Under-Represented Groups into Organizational Decision-Making

Involving young people in the governance of youth organizations is a practice that makes intuitive sense. Who knows better what young people want and need than young people themselves? Nevertheless, youth representation may not always be appropriate. According to Lynn Luckow, National 4-H Council Board Chair, a board should always be aware of its mission, vision, and audience. When youth become a primary audience it makes sense to bring youth to the table. If youth are not a primary audience, it makes less sense to seek youth representation on the board.

A common statement by youth and adults in our study was that youth, by virtue of their age, are best positioned to understand the interests and concerns of young people. As Gabriel Saunkeah of the United Methodist Youth Organization proclaims, "We're living what we're deciding." This insider knowledge can lead to improvements in program design and implementation. Aja Cayetano, youth staff member at the Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD), articulates this sentiment: "We have the knowledge of the day."

Young board members not only understand the issues facing young people; they also have an insider perspective into organizational programs. The vast majority of youth decision-makers in our study were selected internally from organization program participants. On average, the young people we talked with had been involved with their organization for

almost four years. This direct program experience enhanced the board's ability to govern effectively.

According to Patrick Moloughney, Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL) board member, SMYAL was motivated to include youth in decision-making roles because it is a youth-based organization, while most of the adult board members are over 40 and "out of touch with current youth issues." Youth bring suggestions to the board that are reflective of youth concerns within the organization. They have a better understanding of issues facing SMYAL youth and are more in tune with their needs.

Youth representation was a double-edged sword for many of the young people in our study. Several were hesitant to speak for other youth. While reflecting on board service during her adolescence, Amy Weisenbach noted that she frequently reminded boards that, "I don't represent all the young people that you serve. I can't speak for all youth, especially for 'at-risk' youth....I said this so much that I became a 'broken record.'" When talking about her experience with Turner Youth Development Initiative, Rachel Lewis was careful not to generalize to other young people. "Sometimes I wonder," she said, "if I have a different viewpoint because of my positive experiences. I've had opportunities to do great things. I know there are lots of people who are lost, who don't have those chances."

Fortunately, some organizations have successfully confronted this issue. These organizations have found that having young people in significant decision-making roles also provides critical connections to larger social circles of youth and provides a strategy for ensuring diverse representation. These connections are crucial to the success of the organization and could not be made by adults.

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Client/Consumer Board Representation

Client/consumer board representation is a method of enhancing board responsiveness. Two-thirds of the organizations surveyed by the National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations assert that client/consumer board representation is either advantageous (36 percent) or essential (29 percent).[34] Client/consumers have insider understanding of organizational functioning and can bring this knowledge to the board.

Many organizations are searching for ways to interact more directly with their constituents. One method is to add youth to the governing board. In their survey of non-profit boards of directors, National Assembly found that 19 percent of the 653 youth-serving organization boards surveyed have youth members (under age 24) on their boards.[35] Young people are more likely to devote time to organizations that help children and youth than to other service organizations.[36] Youth-serving organizations that have youth members on their boards (1) have positive attitudes about youth board participation, (2) see advantages to having client/consumer representation on boards, (3) say youth board members were readily accepted by other board members, and (4) reject the notion that youth lack the skills needed for board service.[37]

In Hampton, Virginia, members of the youth commission also serve as liaisons on adult commissions. Currently, five city commissions (in addition to the youth commission) have youth members. Youth city planners survey Hampton youth regarding issues being decided upon by the youth commission. The surveys are designed to determine if the issue is really a problem in Hampton and to ask youth how the problem should be addressed. Survey responses are used to provide policy recommendations to the Youth Commission. The Youth Commission then reviews the recommendations, makes revisions, and presents the revised policy recommendations to the City Council.

The Federal Hocking student council is the primary decision-making body in the city's high school. According to student Michelle Jones, the student council "decides what happens in the school." When making decisions, the council tries to get input from the student body. For example, they often solicit written suggestions from the entire student body. There is also a specific time allotted on Friday mornings for students to have formal discussions among themselves. The student council trustees, a small group of council members, meet daily to carry out the decisions of the larger group.

SMYAL youth board members are required to serve on a youth council in addition to their board service. They meet regularly with this larger group of youth and ask their opinions on issues that the board is debating. Participating in the youth council also allows the youth board members to have a better understanding of the issues and concerns currently facing a broader range of SMYAL youth.

Youth Bring a
Fresh Perspective

Our interviews are filled with examples of how youth governance improves the entrepreneurial nature of organizational decision-making. Youth help spark innovation. As a participant in our DC focus group stated, "Youth blow the doors off governance!" They're less afraid than adults to challenge existing organizational processes and culture, and they seem to be less inhibited by social norms. "They're not jaded and faded," says Kashyap Choksi of National 4-H Council.

Adding youth members to National 4-H Council's Board of Trustees enabled a move from a traditional board structure to one that focused on "issues, development, learning, and agenda setting," says Don Floyd, Council's CEO. In other words, the addition of youth board members helped the board transition from a traditional board structure focused on "holding-the-bottom-line" to an entrepreneurial structure alive with new ideas.

Characteristics of a good entrepreneurial board member include (1) a tolerance for ambiguity, (2) willingness to take risks, (3) curiosity, (4) desire to be where the action is, and (5) creativity.[38] Many of these characteristics consistently come up when we ask people what youth bring to board functioning. We hear that youth bring new ideas and high energy. They also bring a new vantage point to organizational decision-making and are more willing to question organizational procedure. "They don't let us get away with, 'because that's the way we've always done it,'" says Sharon Schainker of National 4-H Council, "They're not satisfied with 'we tried that, and it didn't work.'"

The adults we interviewed frequently noted that youth bring a "fresh" perspective to boards. Youth are free to say things that challenge people and institutions. Young people are free to question organizational functioning in a way that adults do not. Similar behavior, if executed by an adult,

would be considered inappropriate and not tolerated, or at a minimum, not reinforced.

According to Linda Camino, organizational mastery is the goal of organizations. Mastery involves (1) continuous clarification of what is important and (2) continuous learning to see current reality more clearly. Mastery is a process that both maps the past and plans for the future. Not a definitive statement of the truth, mastery is, rather, a rigorous inquiry of what is and the conflicts and dilemmas that limit the potential for desired change.[39] Therefore, young peoples' freedom to question current norms contributes positively to effective organizational decision-making.

During the middle of a board discussion dominated by adult board members, a twelve-year-old National 4-H Council board member scribbled something on the back of his name placard. He then held up the placard. "JARGON," it said. He told the board that they all need to speak the same language so that everyone can have the same level of understanding or at least define jargon when it is used.

Young people have a way, rarely subtle and often fresh, of bringing attention to their needs and concerns. What organizations often discover is that the voices of youth at the table are generalizable to others. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), for example, was contemplating improving board processes for the benefit of younger members. The board soon realized that all of the issues raised for youth also pertained to adults. "It is not just youth who may feel silenced or who might benefit from defining terminology," said one board member. Similarly, National 4-H Council has increased its use of breakout sessions and group activities to enhance decision-

making, a shift originally meant to accommodate young people, but one that ultimately benefited adults as well. In brief, communication in decision-making groups, such as boards, seems to improve when the organization seeks to address youth concerns and meet the needs of young people.

Young People help build relationships within the organization

Almost every adult we spoke to stressed that young people often bring a sense of community and energy to decision-making processes. The young people agreed. Many commented that they would not be able to sustain participation if the meetings were boring and without clear purpose and excitement.

Monica Alatorre of Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) notes that her organization's board meetings are interesting, nontraditional, and casual, and she attributes the participation of youth as contributing to these dynamics. The young people on their board come to work hard, to contribute their knowledge and skill, and to see their friends and to form relationships with adults. The desire of young people to have fun also contributes to the success of the board. The board members seem to enjoy each other's company and "this is contagious throughout the organization," Monica says. Relationships are formed and a shared identity is created among the members, leading to a willingness to fully discuss the pros and cons of issues, and to reach consensus.

Lynn Luckow, chair of three diverse boards, concurs. Shared learning and decision-making are the rule, not the exception, when it comes to effective decision-making bodies. On healthy boards, he notes, "there is an overt attention to trust building."

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Adolescence as a time to seek personal autonomy

Although the development of autonomy is an important psychological issue throughout the life span, it is especially salient during adolescence because of the cognitive and social role changes that occur during this period.[40] Research indicates a developmental imperative to experiment with and achieve three types of autonomy during adolescence: emotional, behavioral, and moral. This experimentation takes place where adolescents interact on a daily basis—schools, organizations, and neighborhoods.

First, emotional autonomy refers to changes in the adolescent's close relationships, especially with parents and other significant adults. Second, as a young person goes through a process of individuation, he or she tries out different behaviors for making and following through with independent decisions regarding his or her own behavior. The third aspect of autonomy during this period is the development of morality. Most adolescents are drawn to the personal struggle of creating a set of principles about right and wrong and about what is important and what is not.[41]

Given these developmental imperatives, it is no wonder that young people contribute a fresh perspective.

Adolescence as a time for philosophy, social justice, and action

Adolescence is a time for exploring values related to individual morality and social justice.[42] It is also a time for evaluating social institutions and their present direction. Because of this, youth represent the new lifeblood of society, replacing what is no longer functional with something new and fresh.[43]

Between the ages of approximately twelve and eighteen, many adolescents experience dramatic changes in cognitive functioning. They become increasingly more capable of abstract thinking and problem solving. They become less egocentric, better able to view things in relative rather than absolute terms, and more aware of their subjective experience. This, along with life experience in social groups, allows the adolescent to become a stronger problem-solver. It also allows the adolescent the capability to more thoughtfully and completely question and explore the validity of society's truths and the rightness of its laws.[44]

There seems to be a developmental imperative to question and act on society, especially during the later years of adolescence. Adolescents hunger for ways to prove themselves in ways that are visible and that contribute to others. Young people cannot develop a sense of their own value unless they have opportunities to be of value to others.[45] It is not surprising, therefore, that older adolescents have commitment and energy when they perceive themselves as being on a mission or part of a cause.[46] Nor is it surprising that most organizations led by youth and young adults include social activism as one of their primary purposes.[47] Thus we should expect that, with increasing age (a) young people will be more likely to demand involvement in decision-making, and (b) innovative organizations will be more likely to seek out their participation.

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Adolescence as a time to search for communion, identity, and friendship

Adolescents have a developmental need to feel that they belong and are socially connected. It is especially important for the young person to feel a part of places, such as organizations, schools, and neighborhoods.[48] With age the young person has an increasing need to be connected to employment and other settings where he or she can master work and other life skills needed for adulthood.[49] Adolescents, therefore, seek out and benefit from experiences and processes where they see themselves not just as spectators, but also as active participants who belong to communities.[50]

Friends offer essential support, companionship, and feedback that adolescents cannot get from adults. The peer group plays a critical role in developing adolescents' capacity for building intimacy, shaping sexual behavior, and enhancing psychological well-being. Peers also provide a safe place for adolescents to test out decision-making skills.[51] It is not surprising that young people are often more willing to engage in collective decision-making and action when their peers are also participating. Further, older adolescents have different conceptions of friendship from those of their younger peers. They place more emphasis on trust and loyalty as defining features of friendship and have a need to become more self-disclosing in their relationships.[52]

According to Luckow, personal values and attitudes towards others are more critical than knowledge.

What do Adults Bring to Effective Decision-Making?

Organizational effectiveness is a collaborative concept, requiring youth-adult partnerships. Here, we present findings on what adults contribute.

Adults Bring the Lessons of Age and Past Participation

Almost all youth and adults emphasized that adults bring work experience and expertise as their contribution to organizational functioning. Adults, by virtue of age, have had more experience working—succeeding and failing—in a variety of organizations, experience seen as critical to effective decision-making. Equally important, adults were seen as having important connections. Whereas youth had important connections

with other youth in the community, adults were more connected—by virtue of age and institutional power—to other community resources, such as money, status, and legitimacy. Perhaps most importantly, adults brought a willingness to share their experience and connections for the benefit of youth and the organization.

Young people readily accept knowledge and wisdom from adults. As McKenna Morrigan, Looking Glass Station 7 peer educator and youth board member, says, "That's one thing we absolutely don't have. We can be really dedicated, but we don't have the experience, the wisdom and lengthy perspective that adults have.

Adults bring support and guidance to young people

When interviewing adults, the words "guidance" and "direction" are used most frequently to describe the role of adult organization leaders in relation to young people.

Specifically, adults describe themselves as advisors, mentors, teachers, and coaches. Most youth used similar words, but some chose to emphasize words more directly reflective of equality and partnership. Young people agree that they need guidance and support, although they did not use terms such as "coach" and "advisor" as frequently. Decision-making and action seem to be enhanced when adults view themselves as guides and coaches. "Students play the biggest role in the school. Teachers are there to advise us," says Michelle Jones of Federal Hocking High School.

Jim Williams, YLI board member, says that his organization "demands that young people do the work and decide what types of outcomes they want. YLI provides the structure so that all can get involved. It is universal among all young people that they want to run the show. This is the critical factor: kids choose the issue, adults guide and train them through the action. This is what we do best." Jared Lledefonzo, youth staff at YLI, concurs, stressing however that support needs to be in the context of empowerment. "Young people need to hear, 'we'll be here to support you, but you will be leading, you are in charge.' Adults who are open-minded are more capable of effectively supporting youth," Jared said.

Similarly, Aja Cayetano, youth staff at CYWD, noted that support is given when adults "teach us what they know... as allies to us," but requires that "adults know when to step back." Anna Freedman of West Eugene Teen Court supported this. "What we are looking for," Anna says, "is someone who will treat us like equals. When adults look down on us, not only does it feel bad but it hinders what we're able to do."

Adults Create Infrastructure for Administration and Programming

It is the job of adults to create an organizational structure that is administratively viable and financially self-sustaining. Young people, possibly through lack of experience, connections, or time, are typically unable to take on these responsibilities. The young people and adults we spoke with clearly concluded that providing structure allowed youth to prosper in their decision-making capacities.

Bruce Steinmetz, Bethel/West Eugene Teen Court Director, provides a great deal of logistical, behind-the-scenes support so that youth are capable of running the trials with minimal assistance from adults. Tabitha Aggers, youth case presenter and juror, said that she appreciates support provided by Bruce and other adults because "it assures that all jurors are able to contribute, and that all voices are heard."

CYWD is an organization that uniquely supports young people facing tough challenges, such as homelessness and early pregnancy. CYWD not only helps young people meet their basic needs, but also hires them as staff members in positions from executive director to street outreach worker. This organization was an inspiring example of adult support for youth development.

At the CYWD (run by youth, but with an all-adult board), Jessica, age twenty, spoke of how in the past the organization "did not really need the board to do much." As it has gone through large-scale changes, however, "the organization now needs more support," she said. When asked what kind of support the organization needed, Jessica stressed that they needed adult board members who could get them information and apply it

to their challenges, set up benefit packages and controls, use their connections to recruit new board members, and to help write the proposals and make entrées to funding sources.

A young person at Y-Press, Drew Reissaus, reiterated throughout his interview that adults should allow young people to have a lot of organizational autonomy but, at the same time, take responsibility for logistical areas like fund-raising.

Adults Provide Instruction

Each young person emphasized that they too have relevant experiences and expertise. Some of them have already been in positions where they provided structure and direction to others. But overall, young people agreed that experience is most importantly what adults bring to organizational decision-making.

Annina Burns, a young adult trustee at National 4-H Council speaks to the experience level of adults: "Many adults bring corporate experience, seeing things that have happened before, what worked, what did not." Burns notes that she has learned from adults "the macro view of things, rather than bottom up."

"By learning through adult experience, we're standing on the shoulders of giants," said Gabriel Saunkeah, a key decision-maker at the United Methodist Youth Organization.

Experience is one thing; being able to convey it well is quite another. Marlene, youth staff at CYWD emphasized the importance of adults "teaching or passing on what they know and being able to do it without being possessive of the knowledge or the young people." Jared Lledefonzo, youth staff at Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), spoke to a similar theme. When adults offer their experience, he

said, "they should try to understand where youth are coming from. Adults should approach youth from their viewpoint, not through an adult lens."

5

Impacts of Youth on Adults

Adults' negative stereotypes and attitudes towards young people have a strong, negative impact on the lives of youth. It is not only the young people who suffer; communities also suffer. A community cannot achieve optimal health and functioning while disparaging a major segment of its membership.

For almost one hundred years, young people have been progressively isolated from community and organizational decision-making. Social change occurs over a long period of time and requires shifts in policy, public institutions, and grassroots organizations. A critical target for change at each level is adult attitudes towards youth. Communities cannot develop if subgroups are excluded psychologically and structurally.[53] Understanding how to shift adult attitudes toward youth is critical knowledge for change.

Adult Outcomes Resulting from Youth Participation

This chapter identifies the four main positive adult outcomes that we found can be attributed to youth infusion. Our data show that simply interacting with young people does not lead to attitude change; rather, certain conditions need to be present to facilitate attitude change. We outline these conditions in Chapter 7.

Outcome 1

Adults witness the competence of youth, and perceive them as critical to organizational improvement

There is no substitute for direct observation and experience. Attitudes are most likely to change through processes of intimate interaction and common cause. Such conditions exist when boards and other decision-making bodies are operating at their best.

Phillip Lovell, a young adult member of the Center for Youth as Resources board, said, "For adults to appreciate the contribution of young people, they need to see that [young people] can be competent and dedicated contributors to the organization. They have to really experience it."

It was the experience of observing and interacting with the competence of youth that led to the attitude change among many adult governing-members.

Jack Gherty, National 4-H Council adult trustee, initially questioned the wisdom of placing youth on board seats. He was concerned with "return on management time," thinking that youth presence would interfere with efficient decision-making processes. As he participated in an initial adult-youth board meeting, his perspective changed "180 degrees," given the quality of youth input and their potential contribution to the organization's mission.

Many adults revealed their appreciation for the cognitive and social competence of young people, especially the older adolescents and young adults. They were impressed with the ability of these young people to integrate multiple perspectives and to clearly state their own position.

Outcome 2

Adults enhance their commitment to the organization

During our interviews, adults often noted youth commitment. Some adults commented that they had unknowingly bought into the

stereotype of the disaffected, antisocial youth, and that their direct experience contradicted that and forced reconsideration.

Ben Smilowitz, National 4-H Council youth trustee, observed how he had consulted with a CPA to prepare for one board meeting and surprised the adults with his insight during a budget discussion. Similarly, Annina Burns, another young person on Council's board, noted that she was first perceived as "just a kid," but after the board members realized that she had started her own organization in high school and had strong grassroots knowledge, she saw attitudes start to shift.

George Wood, the principal of Federal Hocking High School, observes that young people are rigorous in their preparation for interviewing prospective staff and spend extensive time reviewing credentials and personal statements. Wood asserts that consequently, "kids are better at interviewing new staff than staff."

Adults and youth also comment on the energy, passion, and emotional connection that youth bring to their work. Youth themselves often characterized their involvement in decision-making roles as feeling part of a social movement. In fact, it is the idea of being on a mission that seems to sustain the involvement of young people in community organizations.[54] "Intensity" was a word that was used to characterize youths' engagement. Tracy Boggs, for example, an adult staff member of Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), believes that the energy and emotional investment of the youth members of SMYAL is more intense than that of adults. Wendy Potasnik, an adult staff member at Y-Press, characterized youth in her organization as highly motivated, willing to do whatever it takes to cover the stories of their choice for the news bureau.

These qualities of youth affect adults on two levels. First, they contribute to attitude change by instilling a new, more holistic perspective of young people. Research on the contact theory of attitude change shows that attitudes can be modified through interpersonal contact with unfamiliar persons, but that such change occurs primarily under conditions when groups of people are enjoying themselves, working for a common cause, and exhibiting commitment to that cause.[55]

Paul Arismendez, an adult from the United Methodist Youth Organization, said being involved with this organization opened his eyes "to the capabilities of youth." He is witnessing young people do things that he was never exposed to in his childhood and is amazed at how they excel. He was surprised to "see their interest and willingness to work together toward something that benefits other youth, and how they are capable of staying focused while working through difficult and tedious tasks." His perception of youth changed when he saw "youth embrace their responsibility and be empowered by it."

Second, and equally important are behavioral changes among adults. Most frequently, adults concluded that their level of involvement in the work at hand increased because of their collaborations with youth. According to Tracy Boggs, adult staff member at SMYAL, the emotional connection that youth bring to community and youth-oriented issues tends to spark adult interest in these issues. Their emotional energy is contagious, says Monica Alatorre, an adult staff member from YLI. Wendy Potasnik characterizes this behavioral effect similarly. She says that the optimism and motivation of youth stretches adult staff members at Y-Press.

"If I were working out of a corporate center in downtown Washington," observes Dick Sauer, former CEO of National 4-H Council, "I would not be as committed to this. I would not even see youth most of the time. Here at the conference center, [where National 4-H Council is headquartered], I get to talk to young people all of the time.... I personally see and hear the passion of young people, and this gets me more interested and involved."

Finally, staff from National 4-H Council and YLI frequently commented that adult board members act more responsibly when young people are on boards. The adults witness the commitment that youth bring to these forums and try to match it. Several people noted that adults come to meetings more promptly when youth were brought to the board. This may be because they are trying to match the commitment of youth and/or because they simply enjoy the meetings more. "Young people bring energy and passion to the board. It just feels different...it's more fun coming to work," says Don Floyd, CEO of National 4-H Council.

Outcome 3
Adults feel more effective and competent in working with youth

We found that sharing decision-making responsibilities with young people enhanced adults' sense of efficacy and mastery. In part, this is because the work greatly reduces the

CASE EXAMPLE

Kashyap Choksi,
Vice-President, Youth-Corporate
Connections team, National 4-H Council

Kashayp Choksi of the Youth-Corporate Connections team, a division of National 4-H Council, came to Council after completing a graduate program in public administration. He was unaware of youth-adult partnerships as an organizational change strategy, and on learning of it, Kashyap feared that such efforts amounted to tokenism. But Council's interest and value in the concept motivated him to give youth governance a chance. More important, according to Kashyap, there were role models in the organization.

It was Kashyap's direct experience, however, that transformed his attitude. He witnessed the competence and commitment of youth and the relevance of their contributions. This "really changed my mind," he says. For example, soon after taking his new job at Council, Kashyap was working with representatives from Honda Corporation and a group of young people. The contributions of several young people in shaping a curriculum impressed Kashyap, and he thought, "I wish I was that way at that age." Then he thought, he says with laughter, "I wish I was like that now!"

Kashyap still sees formidable obstacles to youth-adult partnerships. These include scheduling problems, lack of confidence and experience for some youth, need for training for some youth, and persistent adult stereotypes. However, he says, "Young people have solutions and ideas that adults don't have." The results of increased program effectiveness convinced him that meeting the challenge of integrating youth in decision-making is worth the effort.

isolation between adults and youth. It allows adults to engage youth in more active, purposeful, and collaborative ways, and to share the experience of success. Because of this, adults report coming out of youth-adult partnerships with new strategies for interacting with youth and a growing sense of competence in relating to them. Adults reported enjoying working with youth more because of these successful strategies and being able to transfer these strategies outside the decision-making setting.

George Wood, principal of Federal Hocking High School, has observed that teachers like their jobs much more than before because now they share many responsibilities with the students. According to student leader Michele Jones, they employ collaborative administrative, teaching, and classroom management strategies that have fully engaged the majority of the student body in all aspects of school decision-making, planning, and implementation. For example, the school endeavors to teach its students decision-making skills and an active citizenship orientation. It is this engagement that allows the school to realize its vision both for the students and the institution. Jones commented that almost all students work on an ongoing basis in community-oriented organizations, public work, and advocacy. Teachers are expected to work alongside the students. During these experiences, says Wood, staff engage with youth on a collegial and collaborative basis, and over time, come to perceive students as "colleagues and partners rather than people to control."

These findings mirror those of the Resource Development Institute (RDI). In researching the Promise Project in Kansas City, RDI concluded that youth-adult partnerships often resulted in an increase in adults' sense of efficacy, and

that this confidence and sense of empowerment transferred to other settings.[56]

Outcome 4

Adults develop a stronger sense of community connectedness

Perhaps the most important outcome we found was that adults gained a strong sense of connectedness with those on the board and within the organization. This feeling of community emanated directly from the processes highlighted above: (1) the adults began to see young people less as stereotypes and more as contributors, (2) the adults were personally engaged by the commitment of the young people, and (3) the adults gained mastery through working collaboratively with youth. Consequently, the adults began to feel connected and gained a shared identity with the youth as well as an attachment to the organization.

Patrick Moloughney, SMYAL board member, noted that his experience in collaborating with youth contributed strongly to his loyalty to the organization and to the youth in it. He felt as though he was part of a family at SMYAL, and was anticipating deep sadness upon leaving the organization and Washington, DC, to go to graduate school. Patrick's sense of community came about as a result of (a) sharing his time, energy, and talents with youth, (b) experiencing youth contribute their own energy and talent, and (c) promoting the values of the collective with youth.

This finding is consistent with past research. Studies indicate that community is forged, in part, through shared goals and common values, and through structured and collaborative processes that achieve these goals and express these values. The result is a sense of membership, spirit, and community for individuals.[57]

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

The Benefits of Community for Adults

Research indicates that authentic partnerships with youth promote the well-being of adults. Healthy adulthood is characterized by generativity—a widening commitment to take care of the next generation. Research also finds that adults define successful aging mostly in terms of relationships, specifically caring about and getting along with others.[58] An increasing number of older Americans are seeking connection through voluntary action and membership in neighborhoods, social networks, clubs, and community organizations.[59]

When adults feel a sense of community, they are more likely to have positive attitudes towards youth and in the ability of youth to contribute to decision-making and action.[60] Community connectedness is related to positive social relations, feelings of control and empowerment, and voluntary participation in neighborhood action. It contributes to neighborhood stability and growth.[61] In schools, a sense of community has been found to positively contribute to teachers' commitment and engagement.[62] In corporate workplaces, a sense of community is associated with job satisfaction, turnover, and productivity.[63]

6

Impacts of Youth on Organizations

One aim in this study was to identify the range of organizational outcomes that may arise from young people acting as decision-makers. Through our research we have determined six primary domains of organizational change, which we discuss below.

Outcome 1

Youth involvement becomes
the organizational expectation

Youth infusion within the organization is enhanced as a result of having youth involved in governance roles. Organizations often begin by adding one or two young people to their governing structure. They may hire a youth staff person or add a young person to their board of directors. This initial youth involvement in decision-making is a starting point for organizational climate change. The youth decision-makers and adult leaders then drive organizations to create more decision-making roles for youth at a variety of levels within the organization. Involving youth in organizational direction-setting becomes standard operating procedure throughout the organization. Youth-Corporate Connections Vice-President Kashyap Choksi, describes this process within National 4-H Council. "Now it's difficult to even think about not involving youth in everything we do."

In 1996, the city Planning Department in Hampton, Virginia, hired two high school students to work as part-time city planners. These youth recommended that the city develop a Youth Commission with the same power as other city planning commissions. Their idea

was adopted, and the city now has a Youth Commission comprised of twenty young people who are representative of a broad spectrum of youth in the city. Because of the success of the Youth Commission, youth members have since been added to six standing commissions including the Neighborhood Commission and the Arts Commission. Principals in each of the secondary schools have adopted a Youth Advisory Council to guide their work, and the School Superintendent has developed his own powerful Youth Advisory Council. Hampton Coalition for Youth Director, Cindy Carlson, summarizes, "You can't do something around here without someone asking for youth input."

In many of the organizations we spoke to, this organizational culture change was accelerated by staff turnover. When adult staff and board members who were unwilling to share power with young people left the organization, they were purposefully replaced by individuals who accepted youth participation in organizational decision-making. Sharon Schainker, Human Resources Manager for National 4-H Council, commented on this process: "Youth values are values that the organization is trying to perpetuate, so there is a synergy there. The organization is trying to become more youthful. People sometimes leave because they can't handle the ambiguity." Although work settings that require collaborating with young people are difficult for some, other adults thrive within them.

A teacher at Federal Hocking High School had regular conflicts with students who questioned her classroom practices and frequently sent them to the principal's

office. In the end, the teacher was fired because she was unable to accommodate her practice to a culture in which students had significant authority within the classroom. Most teachers, however, find that the new school environment supports good educational practice, says Principal George Wood. Most importantly, they feel that the students are partners in creating a learning environment, which takes a great deal of pressure off the teacher – in everything from discipline to creating engaging classroom lessons. School staff members feel that students are on their side rather than being in resistant opposition.

Outcome 2

Young people clarify the organization's mission
Effective organizational governance emphasizes mission and vision. Current management theory indicates that the most important work of any governing board is to create and re-create the reason for organizational existence, with institution-building tasks such as fundraising and developing contacts serving as supporting roles to this end.[64] It is within this context that young people probably have their strongest impact. Both youth and adults agreed that young people help clarify and bring focus to the organization's mission. Through informal and formal means, young people become the keepers and protectors of the mission.

Many adults were surprised at the abilities of the young people to constructively engage in discussions of vision.

The city's Neighborhood Initiative in Hampton, Virginia, has established a policy that requires all city-sponsored neighborhood-planning efforts to have young people involved. This mandate comes from their positive experience with involving youth in neighborhood plans. One adult commented, "Oh my gosh, young people are

better at establishing a mission for our planning efforts than we are."

Some organizations have given youth a specific distinction because of their ability to protect the mission. For example, the United Methodist Youth Organization has restructured its executive positions so that the young Chairperson is supported by a Spiritual Senator who is responsible for keeping the mission and looking out for the spiritual health of the organization. Similarly, a young person on National 4-H Council's Board of Trustees serves as the Vice Chair for Mission and Performance and is responsible for monitoring whether the board is meeting its desired ends.[65]

Paul Arismendez, an adult member of the United Methodist Youth Organization governing board, recalled a heated committee discussion where consensus did not appear possible. One young person, the Spiritual Senator, removed herself from the fray and asked the group to step back, reflect on the mission, and take time to pray to God for guidance. Her insight helped to refocus the discussion. As a new member to the committee, Paul was highly surprised by this action, and claims that he has "never served on a committee with adults who have had that kind of insight."

For most organizations, youth serving as direction-setters is not a formal role. Phillip Lovell, youth member of the Center for Youth as Resources board, stated, "My role was more in direction-setting. This was an unspoken role; I didn't have a hat with 'direction' written on it." Adam Werbach, the young board chair of the Sierra Club, describes his role, "My job is to set the agenda—to ensure that we stay consistent with our history and stay excited about our future....My job is to help the board focus on the big picture."[66]

Outcome 3

Organizations become more connected and responsive to youth in the community

According to John Carver, one of the problems facing governing boards is the need to be more involved in the work of the organization. "A board operating at a distance is a board too detached to understand, much less make a difference... [boards] greatly need to 'know what is going on' in the organization."[67] Youth involvement can improve an organization's governance by better connecting decision-makers to organizational operations. According to Letha Kuecker, the desire to have board members with a deep knowledge of the program was the Wisconsin 4-H Foundation's primary motivation for adding youth to their board of directors. Monica Alatorre at Youth Leadership Institute makes a similar observation, "When young people are not involved, things get done on the board, but there is less connection to what the organization is doing."

Marlene Schuman, Director of Turner Youth Development Initiative, says, "There are a lot of youth organizations, but if more of them were doing what kids wanted, kids wouldn't say they had nothing to do. They're not asking them; they're just providing what they think kids need. Not that we've always been successful, but if you involve kids, they'll tell you what does and does not work right away."

The data bear this out. Boards with youth members tend to be more connected to organizational operations and better able to match programming efforts to youth needs. Our interviews with organizations that did not have youth on their boards were revealing. The board members from these organizations were unable to fully describe the organization's pro-

gramming efforts and seemed out of touch with the youth served. In contrast, adults who served on boards with youth were highly connected to the organizational operations and were invested in programming efforts.

Having youth in vital decision-making roles improves programming effectiveness. Directly involving the subjects of youth development—the youth themselves—in the operations of a youth development organization strengthens the organization by making the work more relevant to the lives of youth.[68] Youth have more direct knowledge and understanding of youth and youth culture than do adults. Thus, they bring an insider perspective to governance and help improve the organization's responsiveness to its youth constituents.

The Arts Commission in Hampton, Virginia, has recently added a youth member. As a result, the commission has changed its community-sponsored events to reflect programming aimed more specifically at teens. For example, they now offer photography and pottery classes focused on youth interests.

Having youth involved in organizational decision-making not only improves the relevance of programming, it enhances the organization's ability to reach out to and recruit youth for participation.

Bruce Fisher, Executive Director of Huckleberry Youth Programs, relayed the following story: Early in the development of the Male Involvement Project, Huckleberry staff made the assumption that the program would only include males. The youth members on the leadership team informed the staff that this wasn't a good idea: "If you want to attract young guys to become involved, then you need to have young women at the events." The staff took this advice, despite

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fears that including women would jeopardize their funding. Now, most of the Male Involvement Project events have young women—and young men—present.

Outcome 4

Organizations place greater value on inclusivity and representation

The success of youth infusion was often duplicated with a variety of under-represented groups. Patrick Moloughney, SMYAL board member, observes that his experiences with youth might extend to other populations. "It makes you think, 'gee, anyone can have a great idea whether they're young or over 50, or black, or something else.'" Similarly, because of the success of its youth program governed by youth, the United Methodist Church is contemplating adopting this governance model with other populations within their organization (e.g., the elderly and ethnic minority groups).

Having youth at the decision-making table also improves the representative nature of programs offered by organizations. Their focus on diversity and fairness leads to policy changes and new conversations for organizations.

According to young person Nathanael Cherry, Hampton City Planner, the city's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board recently asked the Youth Commission to give their opinion on the development of a new park space in the city. The Youth Commission researched the issue and the history of the land and drew up a general-use plan for the space. Another group of adults presented a plan to the board that called for turning the entire area into softball fields. In contrast, the youth plan took into account park usage by a variety of community groups (not just softball players) and also protected the historic burial grounds and wetlands on the site. Despite opposition, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board adopted the Youth Commission's general-use plan.

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Challenges in Bringing Under-Represented Groups to the Table

Ultimately, it is up to a few committed adults to push the organization to bring under-represented groups to the table. The difficulty of this mobilization cannot be overestimated. Research identifies some of the most challenging barriers:

1. Lack of knowledge—Many youth have not previously been involved in decision-making. There is some basic procedural and programming knowledge that must be gained to be an effective participant.

2. Unwillingness to get involved—Having not been invited to the table before, many youth are rightly skeptical that their voice and vote will count.

3. Unwillingness to share power—Many adults (and youth) do not like to share power once they achieve it themselves. Additionally, adults who do not feel empowered do not want to share their minimal power with youth.

4. Lack of a support network—Simply bringing youth to the table is not enough. Early on, concerted efforts need to be made to ensure they succeed.

5. Unclear roles—When people are in a new situation, structure and clarity is essential.[69]

6. Unique needs—Organizations must also pay attention to the unique scheduling, transportation, and financial constraints that are often associated with under-represented groups.[70]

CASE EXAMPLE

Rachel Lewis, Turner Youth Development Initiative Youth Staff Member

Rachel Lewis has long been involved as a youth activist in Bozeman, Montana. As student body president, school board student representative, and member of community groups, she played an active role both inside and outside her high school.

She helped include young people in the process of dialogue and policy-making after a series of Columbine-inspired bomb threats led to restrictive actions within the schools. The administration banned student backpacks, locked doors, and did away with hall passes without explanation. The students were upset and Rachel told them, "The school board meeting is tonight. Come say what you've been saying about the backpack ban." Students attended the meeting and voiced their concerns. Rachel notes, "It was the most exciting meeting I'd been to."

Working with a community-based organization, she also created and hosted a radio call-in show with a group of young people. Describing the show, she said, "It's for the community to understand young people. They now think of us as this doomed generation, like we're all terrible. We tried to show that young people have a lot to offer, that we don't think that differently from adults."

Starting from a seat on the student council in the 6th grade, Rachel built her network of connections and skills that allowed her to make a difference. Rachel and other students sat on a committee that interviewed candidates for principal. As a student council member, she had lunch with the superintendent of schools every month. As a non-voting student member of the school board, she found that the adult members listened to her after she built relationships with them. It was also a place to get quoted in the newspaper if there was something that needed to be addressed.

Largely under the auspices of Turner Youth Development Initiative, young people in Bozeman have made an impact. They have successfully waged a long battle with city government to build a skateboard park, worked to create a coffeehouse gathering-place for young people, and organized a youth-adult partnership supporting community service in which young people receive tangible awards for performing volunteer work.

Outcome 5

*Organizations are more appealing
to potential funders*

Very recently, some funders have begun asking youth organizations if they have youth on their boards. Pressure for the inclusion of youth decision-makers in non-profit organizations is primarily coming from private foundations, but this trend may spill over into government funding.[71] One of the primary motivations for Huckleberry Youth Programs to investigate adding youth to their board of directors was to attract additional foundation support. Other programs have discovered a similar benefit.

The GLSEN board of directors established a Youth on Board committee to research the issue of adding youth to their board structure. In addition to investigating legal, liability, and board process issues, the committee was concerned about the funding implications of adding youth to their board structure. Much to their surprise, the committee discovered that some of the foundations that they seek funding from are asking if they have youth on board, and that by adding youth members they could improve their ability to secure funds.

Organizations also use young people to pitch funding requests. An evaluation of Youth on Board programs revealed that these organizations frequently use young people as representatives and presenters to prospective funders.[72] Youth are powerful spokespeople when requesting money from funders. Funders are not accustomed to hearing directly from youth, so young people can make a strong impression. Additionally, funders find it more difficult to turn down youth requests for money than similar requests from adults.

Amy Weisenbach, National 4-H Council staff member, recalled a project she did a few years ago in which she had young people write funding letters for the organization: "I can't tell you how many people I had say 'the only reason I am giving you this is because I have never gotten a letter from a 14-year-old before.'"

In addition to having a direct funding impact on organizations, youth can have an indirect effect on an organization's ability to raise funds. Working directly with youth improves adults' understanding of and commitment to the organization. Thus, they are more motivated to support the organization—including, but not limited to, financial support. Susan Crown, board chair of SMYAL, proclaimed that working directly

with youth, "made me want to shout from the rooftops to get funds and build support for the organization."

Outcome 6

Organizations reach out to the community

One of the most pervasive stereotypes of youth is that they are only action-oriented and do not have the patience to sit through meetings. As documented throughout this report, this stereotype is unfounded. Youth do sit in meetings, and they do contribute substantially to policy and programmatic change. But, the stereotype has some truth; young people are action-oriented. As research consistently demonstrates (see Chapter 4), and as highlighted in the following example, youth find the greatest purpose through direct community action.

The Youth Commission in Hampton, Virginia, has influenced important policy changes in the community since its inception. In 1999, the Youth Commission addressed the concern of a lack of alternate forms of public transportation. Based on their research, the young people determined that the bicycle ordinance should be changed to make it legal for people to ride their bikes on the sidewalk until more bike paths were developed in the city. The city council adopted their recommendation. Despite this success, the young people "have a hard time understanding that they're really doing something," according to Cindy Carlson. Therefore, they are sponsoring a community service project as a part of their work on the Youth Commission. The community service not only allows the youth to feel more like they're significantly influencing the community, it also serves as a way to make their work more visible to the community.

One of the most consistent findings in this study is that youth-infused organizations are

highly likely to be involved with young people in community advocacy, policy-making, and service. This community outreach offers many direct and tangible benefits.

Youth staff at the Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD) begin their work at the organization as outreach workers, providing direct services to young women living on the streets. Many staff members were living on the streets themselves before working at CYWD. Thus, CYWD not only provides direct service to homeless youth, but also employs these young people to further their community outreach efforts. According to youth staff person, Jessica Green, this ensures that the organization "engages in an ongoing process of assessing community needs and designing programs to meet them."

Over time, it is likely that youth-infused organizations, as they gain prominence and visibility in their communities, will serve to set higher expectations for other organizations. Although we did not interview youth or adults outside the sample organizations, some evidence emerged that youth-infused organizations contributed to new individual and community norms about youth participation.

Marlene Schuman of Turner Youth Development Initiative witnessed as other community groups changed their acceptance of governance. Previously, she said, she felt "like a broken record" advocating for youth participation around the community. More recently, while attending meetings, she hears others propose that young people should be involved or consulted when making decisions that will affect them. In addition, watching young people speak in public and advocate for what they believe has inspired adults to do the same. A staff person at Turner Youth Development Initiative reported that she heard an adult say, "If kids can do it — so can I!"

7

Creating Conditions for Organizational Change

Organizational change is not easy to achieve or sustain. In this section of the report, we highlight the conditions, or contexts, that support successful youth governance, leading to adult attitude change and positive organizational outcomes.

Condition 1

The Board of directors is committed to youth governance and entrepreneurial decision-making

In all organizations that made the shift to involving youth at the board level, the decision to adopt entrepreneurial forms of governance coincided with the decision to engage young people as full partners. If a governance body is focused on vision and learning, there is room for young people to make substantial contributions. If the board is more traditionally focused on rule-based forms of management and oversight, then it is less likely that youth will have a significant influence on the board. This is because the effectiveness of entrepreneurial decision-making is dependent on the qualities our data show that young people often bring to boards: a fresh perspective, a willingness to question organizational norms and structures, and an appreciation for integrating discussion with practice.

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Entrepreneurial Decision-Making

In their research on board functioning, John and Elmer Tropman assert the style of board functioning that shows the greatest promise is entrepreneurial. An entrepreneurial board establishes change and innovation as an ongoing part of the organization's activities. Entrepreneurial decision-makers learn to tolerate some failure as a necessary aspect of innovation and empowerment. They establish an expectation for change within the organization and don't settle for doing things because that is the way they've always been done. Their policies make exploration and innovation possible. Entrepreneurial board members are also capable and willing to question the validity of current organizational functioning, including questioning the activities of the executive director, president, and staff members.[73]

Effective organizations have a clear vision to guide their decision-making. Vision promotes durable innovation more than rules and regulations. If everybody knows what the vision is, then this provides the focus for members' creative energy. Strong managers operate on the principle that everybody can contribute to the implementation of the mission with creative input.[74] Vision promotes durable innovation and change.

Effective organizations push decision-making down to the operational level of the hierarchy. Current theory emphasizes that those who are living the work — direct line staff and consumers — should have a strong say in how the work is actually planned and implemented.[75] Such inclusion is perhaps the only way to guarantee that programming is consistent with the realities of the here and now.

Condition 2

Adult leaders strongly advocate for including young people in decision-making roles

Giving youth a significant role in organizational governance violates our social norms. Therefore, it is unlikely to be adopted unless these social norms change. Given the adult grip on power in society, strong advocacy and leadership from individual adults or groups within an organization is required to convince others to bring young people into decision-making roles.

In at least half of the organizations we spoke to, there was mention of a significant individual (or individuals) that strongly advocated for organizational change and the inclusion of youth in organizational governance. These visionaries were influential in changing organizational culture and norms to allow room for youth at decision-making tables.

George Wood, Federal Hocking High School principal, worked against a history of youth exclusion from governance in American schools whose focus tends to be on discipline over empowerment. He held a longstanding personal commitment to democratic participation in institutions and enacted his principles at the school. Groups of community members opposed the loosening of adult authority within the school, and the school board fired him early in his tenure. He was reinstated after students and other supporters took action on his behalf.

His leadership was guided by a commitment to principles of maximum participation rather than to a specific model of practice. Dr. Woods says he hopes for students that "at least once in their lives for four years they have the experience of being taken seriously and living in a democratic community."

Condition 3

Youth provide pressure and support for increasing youth participation in governance

Some organizations are motivated to create decision-making roles for youth because of a strong push from youth within the organization. In some cases this occurs gradually and informally. In other situations, as with GLSEN, groups of youth banded together and encouraged the organization to recognize their voice and give them more formalized power.

Over the past several years, young people have become increasingly more involved in GLSEN-organized programs. Youth at a GLSEN event developed a critical mass that pushed for representation. This ad hoc group—self-titled the Youth Empowerment Initiative— requested to speak to the board about adding youth members to its structure. Their presentation was so moving that the board decided to add youth members. Mary Gentile, adult board member, characterizes the timing as "opportunity meeting appetite."

Young people who are organized politically and socially outside the organization can also encourage organizations to adopt youth governance strategies. Tracy Boggs, a staff member at SMYAL noted the strength that came from the broader gay youth movement. He said, "It's totally different than the adult experience. They're coming out at a younger age very vocally. Once organized nationally, this will be an even larger force." Although SMYAL faced local changes in their population that kept them somewhat disconnected from the national movement, the strength of that movement drew adult attention to the political power of young people and the importance of encouraging their involvement.

Condition 4

*Adults need a variety
of experiences with youth*

Attitude change does not occur when adults perceive their work with youth to be symbolic or tokenistic in nature. Instead, adult attitude change occurs when the interactions: (1) are goal-oriented and purposeful, (2) are lengthy, and (3) have meaningful consequences. It is also important for adults to consider young people as integral to the problem-solving process. Research demonstrates that exposure to stereotyped groups is successful in changing attitudes when the exposure or contact includes shared and structured activities and enough time.[76]

Jim Williams says it this way: "It's hard to get adults to sit at the table. If you can get folks to sit at the table with a group of committed young people, transformation will occur. Interactions have to be ongoing, and have to deal with real issues. If the issues are not real from the perspective of the adults, not only the youth, adults won't sit at the table."

The youth that we interviewed were very clear in concluding that adult attitude change occurs most readily when the young people are able to succeed and perform in the boardroom or in places that adults perceive as their turf.

"Adults have to see something in action before they buy into it. The proof is in the action," says Annina Burns, National 4-H Council board member. Board members often begin thinking that having young people on the board is either "cute" or "wasting our time," she says. Over time, the board members start to see the young people succeeding as board members. "The board members come to realize that we can learn just as fast as them," Burns said.

Philip Lovell, youth board member at Center for Youth as Resources, said this: "There is just as much baggage coming from the young as from the adults. I think it's easier for adults to change when they see young people doing good work. It's enough for adults to see it happen."

Not all adults have the opportunity to interact with youth in decision-making capacities, and even for those who do, the interactions for some are not frequent or relevant enough to bring about attitude change. Fortunately, the data show that observation of positive youth action in the community, combined with opportunities for discussion and reflection, presents another possibility for attitude change. Positive exposure is important for experienced youth workers, not only board members or community residents.

Carolyn Caldwell, development director at YLI, says that she finds young people "inspiring, invigorating...everyday!" Carolyn noted that this was a change for her. She used to work at a traditional youth organization and held traditional stereotypic views. After starting her present job, she spent much time going around the city and observing innovative programming in the Bay Area. "I have learned to look at young people differently," she says. "I learned that we don't have to be telling the story for and of young people. They can do it for themselves."

Condition 5

*Organizations provide support for youth
to advance through a variety of
decision-making opportunities*

The overwhelming majority of youth and young adults that we spoke to had worked their way up through the organization, engaging in a variety of leadership-building and

decision-making opportunities. On average, they had been involved in the organization for almost four years. By the time they were serving on the board of directors or an equally demanding role, they were already experienced decision-makers. Speaking of youth on the Wisconsin 4-H Foundation Board of Directors, board president Letha Kueker explains, "By the time they get to this level they don't have any trouble getting involved, and they're respected by the board."

By advancing youth through various decision-making levels, organizations better prepare them for service and enhance their capability to contribute significantly to organizational improvement. This allows youth who are uninterested or unprepared to participate on a board, for example, to get involved in other ways. In addition to gaining experience in leadership and decision-making, having various opportunities within the organization allows youth to enhance their understanding of the organization. In this way, they are better able to represent other youth that the organization serves.

CYWD has a developmental approach to its recruitment ladder. Young women from the streets are brought on as staff and work their way up in the organization. The entire staff is composed of young people who started on the streets. They receive mentoring and keep the right to return to their jobs even if they find themselves in jail or facing other problems. This accessibility, support, and opportunity to contribute to the organization motivates current and potential staff. "So many girls want to work

here. They want to come here and make changes," said Marlene Sanchez, a program director. The older staff members (in their early twenties) are conscious of the need to leave the organization in order to give opportunities to younger people working their way up the organizational ladder.

Condition 6

Organizations involve older youth in governance positions early on in the organizational change process

Involving young people at the highest levels of governance is a risky and transformational shift for many organizations. Such a decision goes against strongly held societal norms and is often resisted. It is for this reason that organizational leaders were highly selective about the young people who were nominated to be board members.

Youth members on the boards of organizations in our study ranged in age from twelve to twenty-three, with most falling between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. The mean age for youth chosen by organizations to be their spokespersons for this research project was eighteen years. It seems that the organizations, in their desire to ensure the early success of youth governance, have decided to begin with older youth, and to eventually integrate younger adolescents into governance.

Appendix A

Youth-Adult Review of Research Findings: Hampton Coalition for Youth

Written by: Harmonie Mason and Richard Goll
of Hampton Coalition for Youth, Hampton, VA

We both liked the paper and believe it basically represents the state of the art of youth in decision-making. We especially appreciate that the research focuses on the value that young people contribute to developing adults and organizations rather than the youth development perspective, as this is the overlooked element of the equation of youth and adult partnerships. We have attempted to consolidate our comments in places where we had similar reactions. In cases where one of us had a specific issue, it is identified.

How the outcomes are similar to our experiences:

Generally the outcomes are right on target with our experience. Kashyap Choksi's statement "I wish I was like that at that age. In fact I wish I was like that now" (pg. 33) is an important observation Rich often hears from adults who begin to experience well-prepared youth in decision-making roles. It speaks to an awakening more than learning. Rich firmly believes that we must focus on awakening adults instead of trying to teach them new behaviors. This approach reduces resistance and increases acceptance.

One of the challenges is that a desirable outcome of youth involvement is the change in adult attitudes and behaviors. However, it is necessary to have some adults with those attitudes already in order to initiate the change. It is most helpful if it is an adult who is not traditionally in a role of working with youth. (In our case, the Director of Planning Department became convinced of the value of youth involvement, then helped to influence others.)

Another outcome of youth influencing adults is their ability to "cut to the chase." This minimizes the adult tendency to talk redundantly and unnecessarily, thus, allowing work to be completed quicker and more efficiently.

How the described processes are different in our experiences:

We place a much greater emphasis on training and preparation of youth to be involved which is essential for them to have both the skills and confidence to succeed. We believe that this is the most important element of youth involvement so that we do not set them up for failure. Preparation is necessary for adults also, but often they are selected based on experience or knowledge they already have, and thus arrive

with the confidence to succeed. Very few youth come as prepared as the adults do.

We place a much greater emphasis on youth infusion throughout organizations. If an organization is youth-friendly and practices the principles of youth development, having youth at the policy level is less important than having them affect programming. Their relationship with the Executive Director is much more important because that is where the implementation of the infusion takes place. We believe a lot of our success is due to our emphasis on this relationship. However, if an organization is not practicing good youth development principles, having well-prepared youth on the Board is an immediate way to have impact.

We place a much greater emphasis on youth infusion throughout the community. We see governance as involvement in neighborhood groups, civic organizations, schools, city government as well as youth-serving organizations. We believe that successful youth involvement will come with broad representation of trained youth on boards, broad infusion throughout the civic structure of the community, and ample opportunities for youth at the table when decisions are made regarding their well being. Our goal is to make the entire community a better place for all youth, not just youth in one organization.

From Rich's perspective, age is less important than competence. Rich agrees that with age comes a level of experience and often confidence that allows a young person to perform at a higher level, but this is not always true. When selecting anyone for a leadership or decision-making role there needs to be a clear definition of the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to succeed, then you interview to find those who meet the criteria. If a young per-

son's qualities are needed they will be selected based on value added. This makes justifying a young person's selection easier. He also believes that it is important for organizations to determine what makes a good leader and what are the elements of good decision-making. Without consensus on these definitions, individuals – both youth and adults – will be measured by individual beliefs instead of organizational norms. This approach allows both groups to work more effectively and be judged more on skills and qualities than age.

We believe that more attention should be paid to the challenges of developing partnerships between youth and adults. Another condition should be added to Chapter 7: "Adults will be properly prepared to allow youth to participate in meaningful ways." We are struggling with this in situations where the adults are not prepared to work with youth. At best it takes a lot longer; at the worst, it doesn't work at all.

Important issues for funders and foundations: Negative stereotypes toward youth will continue to remain if organizations are not properly training youth for decision-making roles. Nothing changes an adult's opinion quicker than a young person who is properly prepared. Nothing reinforces a stereotype quicker than experiences that substantiate already-held beliefs. It is the organization's fault if adults are allowed to maintain their stereotypes because the youth selected are not trained. Too many organizations value youth participation over properly prepared youth participation.

Harmonie believes it is important that adults want change in order for youth involvement in organizations and government to be accepted as normal. Youth should not be looked at as individuals invading "adult turf" or people that adults are afraid to work with. We [youth] are

not alien or a new creation just discovered, but simply a newly considered group to include in the decision-making process.

Creating good youth and adult partnerships is very difficult. Some programs attempting to involve youth in decision-making often go too far and put the adults in the roles that the young people were in. Partnership is the key element of success, not youth acting alone. On a related note, some adults are turned off to the concept of youth inclusion because they don't feel included themselves. If the adults feel excluded, not empowered, or not well prepared then they will resist anyone else coming on board who may be better prepared, more empowered, or more included.

Appendix B
Participating Organizations

Bethel and West Eugene Teen Court Programs,
Eugene, OR

The Bethel Teen Court and West Eugene Teen Court are City of Eugene Recreation Division programs. These peer-run juvenile courts are authorized to determine consequences for qualifying first-time juvenile offenders at hearings conducted in their respective neighborhoods. Youth volunteers act as jurors, court clerks, bailiffs, defendant advisors, and case presenters. While participation by defendants is voluntary, the outcomes of Teen Court are recognized by the Lane County Department of Youth Services. All defendants must return to serve as jurors in future cases. Court members and defendants range from twelve to seventeen in age.

The Center for Young Women's Development,
San Francisco, CA

The Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD) is a grassroots organization run completely by low income young women of color who have themselves progressed through CYWD's programs. These young women are hired to design and implement all of CYWD's activities in conjunction with a network of coordinating agencies. Young women in the program learn not only how to get out of and stay out of out of the juvenile justice system, but the life and job skills necessary to acquire and sustain legal employment. They also acquire the skills and tools needed to run the agency. These young, poor women who are isolated from their families, marginalized by systems of education, and excluded from mainstream employment move from being victims of their circumstances to being powerful, employed citizens working to enhance their community.

Center for Youth as Resources,
Washington, DC

The Center for Youth as Resources (CYAR) is the umbrella organization for the seventy-three Youth as Resources programs in twenty-two states and four countries. The YAR program--which involves youth as grantmakers (on youth-adult grantmaking boards), decision-makers, and designers and leaders of community service projects--has been operating successfully in all kinds of communities in all types of settings for thirteen years. CYAR provides training and technical assistance to start and sustain YAR programs and is a partner with other national organizations in promoting youth-adult partnerships in community building and youth voice in policy making.

Federal Hocking High School, Stewart, OH

The Federal Hocking High School community strives to help all students become life-long learners and active democratic citizens and to be flexible in their career choices. Central to this mission is helping young people develop the self-esteem necessary to feel that they can make a difference in the world. Federal Hocking High School works to develop challenging learning experiences that actively engage students and connect what they learn with the world around them. It also strives to create a school environment where diversity is

appreciated, where students share the responsibility for acting with compassion, courtesy and courage toward all, and where a respect for one's own and others' heritage is fostered.

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), New York, NY
GLSEN strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected, regardless of sexual orientation. GLSEN's membership is open to any and all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or occupation, who share this philosophy. Through its growing network of eighty-five chapters in thirty-five states, GLSEN strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Founded as a volunteer group in Boston in 1990, GLSEN led the fight that made Massachusetts one of the first states to ban anti-gay discrimination in its public schools in 1993. GLSEN became a national organization in 1994 and has since become one of the nation's leading voices for equality and safety in the educational system

Hampton Coalition for Youth, Hampton, VA
The Hampton Coalition for Youth was formed by the City Council in 1990 to ensure that young people would successfully become the workforce and community leaders of the 21st century. Following a strategic planning process with extensive youth and adult participation, the Coalition developed a plan of action focused on four critical issues: strong families, healthy neighborhoods, positive youth development and involvement, and ongoing community-wide commitment to youth. The Coalition serves as the coordinating, planning, and catalyst organization for youth issues in the city. The office is a department of city gov-

ernment, staffed by full and part time professionals. All activities of the Coalition are developed through teams of staff, city departments, youth, and citizens. The recruitment, training, and support of youth participation in civic opportunities are activities conducted for the Coalition by Alternatives, Inc. a non-profit youth development agency.

Huckleberry Youth Programs, San Francisco, CA
Huckleberry Youth Programs is a community-based agency founded on the belief that adolescence is a turbulent time during which many young people are at risk for life-threatening crises. These crises include drug and alcohol addiction, physical and sexual abuse, emotional illness, physical illness (including HIV infection), family breakdown, homelessness, delinquency and suicide. Huckleberry's mission is to provide adolescents in San Francisco and Marin counties the highest quality of services along a continuum of care ranging from prevention to crisis intervention to stabilization and growth. Core beliefs underlying Huckleberry's services include respect for the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of our clients, recognition of the value and dignity of young people, and acknowledgement of their potential to become healthy, responsible adults.

Looking Glass Station 7, Eugene, OR
Looking Glass is a private, nonprofit celebrating its 30th year of service to Lane County's children, youth and families. Their mission is to help clients work through their problems, so they can lead healthier and more productive lives. Looking Glass offers integrated services through ten different programs that range from prevention to treatment. They work with

such issues as: family conflict, child abuse, homelessness, addiction, delinquency and unemployment. Looking Glass services include counseling, substance abuse treatment, 24-hour crisis intervention, temporary shelter, education, residential treatment and employment. Last year, Looking Glass served more than 7,000 kids and their families.

National 4-H Council, Chevy Chase, MD

National 4-H Council works to advance the 4-H youth development movement to build a world in which youth and adults learn, grow and work together as catalysts for positive change. National 4-H Council partners with the Cooperative Extension System, communities, and other organizations to provide technical support and training, develop curricula, create model programs and promote positive youth development to fulfill its mission.

Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), Washington, DC

As a youth service agency serving the metropolitan area of Washington, DC, including Maryland and Northern Virginia, SMYAL's mission is to support and enhance the self-esteem of sexual minority youth-any youth (aged thirteen to twenty-one) who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), or who may be questioning their sexuality, and to increase public awareness and understanding of their issues. SMYAL is always striving to increase the scope and quality of its services and to provide a safer future for youth who self-identify as lgbt, for youth questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, and for the friends and families of these young people. Established in 1984 following a conference on sexual minority youth issues, SMYAL has become a well-respected community-based organization

providing direct services to youth, training and education to youth service providers, and important information relating to sexuality and gender identity issues to the community at large.

Turner Youth Development Initiative, Bozeman, MT

Funded by the Turner Foundation, the Turner Youth Development initiative was set up in 1997 to connect kids to the community in Bozeman, MT, by engaging them in decision-making and helping them reach their full potential to become active citizens. The work of the initiative is divided up into taskforces consisting of youth and adults working together. The taskforces include: a place of our own (a teen hangout/coffeehouse run by teens), job shadowing, media (which includes a two-hour talk radio show hosted, produced and engineered by young people), skatepark, a youth volunteer program called RAVES (Recreation Awards for Volunteer Service), TYDE Pool (a grant pool for funding young people's ideas), and basic needs.

United Methodist Youth Organization, Nashville, TN

The United Methodist Youth Organization is a nationwide network of youth and adult workers with youth across the church, formed in 1976 by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church. Building on the mission of the Church, to make disciples of Jesus Christ, the particular mission of the United Methodist Youth Organization is to make the United Methodist Church a community of mutual respect and understanding between youth and adults, where influence and worth are not limited by age or experience. The unique nature of the Youth Organization is guided by the fol-

lowing core values: compassion, advocacy, partnership, outreach, and leadership. The ministry is directed by a Steering Committee that is made up of more than 80 percent youth between the ages of twelve and eighteen. The work of the Youth Organization is lived out in three major areas: a biennial Convocation, the Steering Committee, and the Youth Service Fund.

Wisconsin 4-H Foundation

The Wisconsin 4-H Foundation, begun in 1973, is the major fund-raising group for Wisconsin state 4-H programs. It is guided by a Board of Directors that is diverse in composition and that actively involves youth. The Board includes elected representatives of small and larger corporations, people associated with the banking and insurance industries, 4-H alumni, and others. Appointed representatives of UW-Extension programs as well as the Wisconsin Adult and Youth 4-H Leader Councils also actively participate in the decision-making and fund-raising activities of the Board. The mission of the Wisconsin 4-H Foundation is to generate and administer funds and in-kind resources for use in 4-H youth development programs to benefit Wisconsin's youth and to promote these programs to the general public and to donors.

Y-Press, Indianapolis, IN

Y-Press is a youth-driven organization that gives children a voice in the world through journalism. Members produce stories with a youth perspective, allowing them to build communication skills. Y-Press produces a weekly column that appears in The Indianapolis Star on Sundays. Stories are researched, reported and written by reporters (ages ten to thirteen) and editors (ages fourteen

to eighteen) for audiences of all ages. Y-Press typically focuses its efforts on local or regional stories, but also explores and covers national or international topics. Locally, the news bureau has reported on tattling, young politicians, pregnant teens and kids at a detention center. Nationally, news bureau members have reported on Tibetan refugees in Wisconsin, youth affected by the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, and Missouri children on an archeological dig. Internationally, the news bureau has reported from Hong Kong (2000), Russia (1999), Puerto Rico (1998) and Northern Ireland (1997).

Youth Leadership Institute, San Francisco and San Rafael, CA

The Youth Leadership Institute is a community-based institute that joins with young people to build communities that respect, honor and support youth. YLI reaches out to youth who have not traditionally been viewed as leaders and involves them in shaping community change. YLI utilizes social justice, advocacy, and community organizing principles to give young people a voice in creating positive, healthy communities. Each of its programs builds upon the assets and strengths of young people, engaging them in partnership with adults to create social change. YLI believes that young people themselves are best able to define the issues that concern them and identify solutions. Youth involved in our programs gain tools that enhance their development as socially engaged, active community leaders.

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At the Table™

Increasing numbers of young people are joining the ranks of leaders and decision makers in all levels of society. Grounded in the conviction that institutions and communities benefit from the voices of young people, a growing national movement of youth and adults is working to secure a place for youth at the table on even more boards of directors and other governing bodies. At the Table™, an initiative of the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, was created to facilitate a coordinated, sustainable national youth in governance movement. Working together with partners across the country, At the Table™ is helping to educate and inform about the value of youth participation and to prepare youth and adults to work together to create positive change. This research was conducted as part of the At the Table™ initiative.

For more information about this report or the At the Table™ initiative, please contact:

At the Table™
Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development
7100 Connecticut Avenue
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

(301) 961-2837 (voice)
(301) 961-2831 (fax)

info@theinnovationcenter.org
www.theinnovationcenter.org

or

Shep Zeldin, Ph.D.
University of Wisonsin–Madison
Department of Human Development and Family Studies
431 Human Ecology Building
Madison, WI 53706

rszeldin@facstaff.wisc.edu

Shepherd Zeldin is Assistant Professor in the graduate program of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His teaching and research focuses on youth and community development. Dr. Zeldin is also affiliated with 4-H Youth Development, Wisconsin Extension, where he directs community and evaluation initiatives that build on youth/adult partnership. Prior to joining the faculty, he worked in the nonprofit sector for twenty years.

Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and National 4-H Council

7100 Connecticut Avenue • Chevy Chase, MD 20815-4999 • Phone: 301/961-2837 • Fax: 301/961-2831
info@theinnovationcenter.org • www.theinnovationcenter.org

INNOVATION CENTER
for community & youth development