

# Youth United for Change

## Overview

Youth United for Change (Y.U.C) is a nonprofit youth organizing initiative dedicated to developing young leaders in Philadelphia, Pa., and empowering them to improve the quality of education and services in their communities to better meet their needs. The organization seeks to accomplish this goal by providing young people with the leadership skills and opportunities to create systemic change within the school system. Since its inception, Y.U.C.'s leader has successfully generated private funding to finance the organization's work.

## Getting Started

The idea for developing Y.U.C. came about in 1992, when a group of youth at Woodrock, Inc., a local youth development organization, came together during a weekend retreat to learn about and discuss youth organizing in Philadelphia. These conversations spurred the interest of the young people and served as the impetus to establish Y.U.C. Students created the Y.U.C. program and established a chapter model in one local school. Students' first school campaign focused on eliminating the general math and science courses from the curricula to replace them with college-preparatory courses; as a result of the campaign, all students in Philadelphia's high schools take college-preparatory sequence courses.

In 1993, Y.U.C. became its own independent 501(c)(3) organization. As the organization developed, it began to attract large numbers of students and expand its youth organizing work to different sections of the city. Currently, the organization has five chapters with approximately 130 active youth members. Four chapters operate out of four comprehensive neighborhood high schools, and one chapter operates out of a special admissions vocational high school that admits students from across the city. Through their engagement with Y.U.C., students identify and define the issues and concerns they want to address within their high schools and community, gather information and research the issues, and develop plans and strategies for addressing those issues. Once students have developed a plan of action, they meet with school and public officials to discuss the issues and identify solutions. The most recent campaigns have focused on school libraries, college and career preparation, building facilities, the privatization of Philadelphia's public schools, the development of a student educational plan for Philadelphia's public high schools, and the disaggregation of large, failing, comprehensive high schools into small, autonomous schools of 400 students each. By working in teams, these campaigns not only strengthen relationships among youth, but also help young people develop their leadership and decision-making skills.

To ensure youth are prepared for their organizing work, Y.U.C. staff members provide leadership training opportunities in, for example, public speaking, negotiation, critical analysis, team building, decision-making, and problem-solving. In addition, training sessions focus on issues of racism, classism, and sexism; methods for developing organizing strategies; and the Philadelphia school system and the role of government in education. Through this training, students learn about the organization, operation, and structure of the school system and engage in political analysis to understand who is politically connected to whom. Although most training is conducted in-house, Y.U.C. staff members also bring in other groups or individuals from the community to provide issue-specific training. For example, a representative from the American Civil Liberties Union conducted a training session to educate Y.U.C. youth on their individual rights under the law. Often, this training is provided *pro bono* or in-kind, enabling Y.U.C.'s staff members to use its fiscal resources more flexibly to meet other programmatic needs.

## Operation/Organizational Structure

Y.U.C.'s primary staff includes a full-time executive director, a full-time youth organizer, and a full-time administrative assistant. The executive director has overall responsibility for the organization's management and administration, but she also supports one of the local high school chapters. The organization also relies on part-time staff support; these staff members typically include Y.U.C. alumni who are now in college and have returned to the organization to support the student-run Y.U.C. school chapters.

## Financing

Y.U.C. received its initial funding from Woodrock, Inc., the Philadelphia Foundation, the Bread and Roses Community Fund, and the Edward W. Hazen Foundation. The organization continues to receive funding from some of its initial funders as well as a variety of other funders. Although Y.U.C. receives both public and private funding, 90 percent of its funds come from the private sector in the forms of foundation grants and individual donations (see Y.U.C.'s income sources on page 71). In addition, Y.U.C. generates a small portion of its budget through earned income.

## Financing and Sustainability: Keys to Success

Since its inception, Y.U.C. staff have made efforts to leverage funding from different foundations to finance the organization's work. Most of this funding has been unrestricted, enabling the organization to use the funds flexibly to cover its operating expenses. By demonstrating the value of youth organizing to young people and the school systems that serve them, Y.U.C. has managed to build a repeat funder base.

Recognizing that foundation resources are short term in nature, Y.U.C.'s leader has also engaged in long-term planning and has begun to develop strategies to raise dedicated revenue, primarily through fundraisers, that the organization can access when other funds are no longer available.

**Youth United for Change  
Fiscal 2006–07 Income**

William Penn Foundation .....	\$82,300.00
Fund for Children of Philadelphia .....	\$50,000.00
Surdna Foundation .....	\$70,000.00
Community Organizing for Drug Abuse Prevention .....	\$52,400.00
Cricket Island Foundation ....	\$50,000.00
Edward W. Hazen Foundation.....	\$30,000.00
Capacity Building Initiative ...	\$17,000.00
Common Stream .....	\$15,000.00
Norman Foundation .....	\$20,000.00
Individual Donors/Grassroots Fundraising.....	\$8,000.00
Earned Income .....	\$21,000.00
<b>TOTAL INCOME.....</b>	<b>\$415,700.00</b>

For example, the organization held a fundraising dinner event that generated \$8,000 in unrestricted funds. Y.U.C. staff and youth also participated and received compensation (in the amount of \$21,000) for their participation in research studies sponsored by Education Reform Organizing. The organization’s leader has put aside the funds generated from these activities in anticipation of two of its foundation grants ending.

In addition to its financing orientation, another key to Y.U.C.’s sustainability has been its leader’s efforts to engage in strategies to cultivate key champions within the foundation community as well as among local leaders and community-based organizations. These individuals believe in the organization’s work and have ensured it continues to receive financial support. For example, because of the support of staff at the state level, Y.U.C. has been able to maintain its yearly Community Organizing for Drug Abuse Prevention grant. Similarly, because of its long-standing relationship with the Edward W. Hazen Foundation and the success of its youth organizing work, a foundation program officer recently awarded Y.U.C. a two-year grant that will ensure it can cover its funding gaps.

**Next Steps and Future Challenges**

As Y.U.C. continues to grow, a challenge for the organization is developing its staff capacity, particularly at the leadership level. For the organization’s executive director, this means identifying potential candidates (e.g., youth alumni) who could move into the executive director position and identifying ways to create a ladder within the organization that provides leadership opportunities and prepares candidates for the responsibilities required to lead the organization into the future.

To build its organizational capacity and ensure its long-term sustainability, Y.U.C. applied for and received a Capacity Building Initiative grant from the Cricket Island Foundation that provides the organization with access to technical support and assistance as well as resources to invest in program evaluation. Through this grant, Y.U.C. staff members are getting help on how

to develop a participatory evaluation, including assistance on developing a process evaluation to document the quantity and quality of Y.U.C.'s youth organizing activities.

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