

ReGeneration:

YOUNG PEOPLE SHAPING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



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Young People Shaping Environmental Justice

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Preface

In September 2005, during the creation of this report, the U.S. experienced one of the most devastating events in the history of environmental racism. When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, it laid bare the reality of U.S. racism and global environmental destruction. These two dynamics are intimately co-created, and their impacts are most visible in the bodies, spirits and physical environments of poor people of color.

Years before Hurricane Katrina, the forces of environmental racism were well underway. In New Orleans, African Americans were segregated in impoverished wards at the lowest sea levels, where engineers knew the levees would break in a high magnitude hurricane. As forecasters warned that 2005 would be the most powerful hurricane season on record, no government agency planned how to evacuate people without cars, money, credit cards or safe places to go. The days following the hurricane have now become history – almost a thousand dead, thousands stranded in a poisonous nightmare, families torn apart, communities decimated while the federal response continues to be one of neglect and abuse rather than “relief.” Soon thereafter, Hurricane Rita hit the same region and Hurricane Wilma struck Miami, with similarly disastrous consequences for low-income communities and communities of color. The decades to come will tell the even bigger story. How can we rebuild to insure that future disasters do not repeat the same patterns of privilege and oppression? How can we protect and empower our communities?

For decades, the environmental justice movement has been developing holistic solutions to these questions. This report shows how young people across the country are not only fighting the dynamics of environmental injustice, but organizing and leading the way to a new reality. They are working intergenerationally, innovating new approaches and honoring the work of their elders. They are making connections across issue areas and communities, and advancing a vision of a healthy movement that is sustainable for the long haul. Strong grassroots organizational networks led prominently by young people are among those anchoring communities in times of crisis. In the case of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, it was these organizations that ultimately made a difference for people on the ground.

For example, the 21st Century Youth Leadership Movement is an international youth organization with one of its oldest and largest chapters in New Orleans. Activist Taranna Burr recounted how 21st Century responded during the Katrina crisis, working from their base in Selma, Alabama:

The first night, a family of 20 people showed up with no place to go. We have a facility about fifteen minutes from here that can house 400 people. We opened it up and sent them out there.... We were hearing what had happened and had not connected to our people in New Orleans....We went into full swing and decided to make our campsite into an emergency shelter....By the end of the first week we found all of our people from New Orleans. We sent them resources to get them out, to get them here....They had been spread out from Dallas to Houston to Baton Rouge – all over the place...We went out to the community to get the bare necessities. I remember the first

night we collected about \$250 from the local law office. I went to the dollar store and bought a thousand toothbrushes and toothpaste and deodorant. Not waiting for anyone to move – we just did it ourselves.

— from an interview on Hard Knock Radio, Pacifica Radio Network (October 4, 2005)

Burr described how their connections with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives helped 21st Century connect with Farm Aid, and get food for the hurricane victims staying at their campsite. Burr herself intervened when she witnessed a white Red Cross aid worker treating a displaced Latino family inhumanely. 21st Century sent vans to evacuate people out of Mississippi, although they were not able to get into Louisiana.

This year alone, human health and environmental disasters struck El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, India, Pakistan and other nations. These catastrophes illustrate the real implications of climate change and environmental injustice. When disaster strikes, grassroots groups are able to support and mobilize the most vulnerable communities, often in place of governmental and international aid systems.

Environmental justice organizations have the holistic analysis and tools to address the root social causes that exacerbate these catastrophes. Whether you are a racial justice organizer, environmental conservation advocate, or youth development funder, the youth environmental justice movement contains models and insights to reinvigorate every sector of the national progressive movement. The groups in this report offer hopeful solutions for dismantling racism and healing environmental devastation. By supporting these organizations we can work together to create a future that honors our communities and the earth.

Introduction



The Environmental Justice movement is evolving like any movement or person. We are in a moment of self-reflection: Where have we been? Where are we at? Where do we want to be?

—Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice

Growing pains and regeneration

In October 2002, hundreds of activists converged in Washington, D.C. for the largest and most diverse gathering of environmental justice leaders ever in the United States: The Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, or Summit II. Coming from all over the country and the world, these activists gathered to build on the victories and strengthen the roots of their movement. On the second morning of the gathering, the Summit Planning Committee took the stage for the day's opening plenary with an audience of more than 1400 people.

Just as the session was about to start, a group of mostly young people streamed into the room, wielding signs and chanting "No Justice, No Peace!" They were greeted by applause from the entire audience, including those onstage. Seconds later, the protesters themselves took the stage and surrounded the plenary table, making it clear that the Planning Committee was the target of their protest. While some committee members recognized what was coming, others were surprised to be the focus of this mobilization.

A large number of the youth attending the Summit had organized to present carefully crafted demands to the Planning Committee, which

was mostly (but not entirely) adult led. The protesters were partly insisting on more equitable inclusion and support of youth in the environmental justice movement. However, like much youth organizing, the demands were not limited to youth-specific issues. They addressed much broader concerns, such as the tension between professional/academic and community-based leaders in the movement.

Despite interpretation by some of this moment as a sign of weakness in the movement, this strategic confrontation demonstrated the success of base-building and leadership development taken on by the environmental justice movement after the first Summit in 1991. A key goal from Summit I was to strengthen and diversify the base of the movement as a whole, in large part by increasing the leadership of youth, immigrant communities and grassroots activists. With this new diversity also came new complexities, challenges and opportunities. While many elders questioned the young organizers' methods, the protest became an opportunity for authentic intergenerational dialogue on questions shared by organizers of all ages.

Of course, this story represents only one moment in time, not the history and many layers of an entire movement. But it shows the promise of constituencies coming together across time to create stronger alliances for social change. It also creates a vibrant space for posing the crucial questions that this report attempts to address: What does a strong, intergenerational, multiracial movement look like? How do youth and adults see environmental justice and organizing differently? What place does youth-led work have in this movement? How can we create leadership development structures that support youth and elders to grow in local organizations and across a national movement? What is the role of culture and healing in organizing? How does a movement sustain and regenerate itself over many generations? In short, it raises questions that are crucial not only for the continuation of youth organizing in environmental justice, but for the future of the entire progressive movement.

As we settle into the new millennium, most social justice movements in the United States are struggling through a painful period of self-reflection. Still in the shadows of the civil rights and liberation movements of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, we are shining new light on our assumptions and practices and scrutinizing their effectiveness in achieving long-term social change. Calls for new ideas and leadership echo from every corner, with young people often taking the lead on identifying issues as well as creating the space for dialogue and action. Looking back across historic and contemporary movements, the struggles of multigenerational movement building stand out as complex, often painful, and nearly universal. Those engaged in these movements have few opportunities for collective reflection and may even view their experience as "dirty laundry" that should not be aired¹. But it is only through honest reflection and recounting, accompanied by thoughtful listening, that we can reinvigorate movements for social change.

With deep admiration for those building youth leadership in environmental justice, and for their honesty and candor in discussing it, the authors of this report have documented how organizations across the country are thoughtfully and ambitiously addressing multigenerational movement building. In doing so, we hope to spark opportunities for growth that will generate a broader, stronger social justice movement.

¹ Two recent and notable exceptions are: *Blueprint for the Future: Recommendations on Leadership for the 21st Century*, by The Third Wave Foundation, which documents a 2004 gathering to examine the generational transfer of leadership within the field of reproductive health and rights; and *Generational Leadership Listening Sessions*, by the Building Movement Project, which describes the findings of listening sessions with young (age 25-40) leaders across the country.

The intersecting journeys of the environmental justice and youth organizing movements

Environmental justice and youth organizing are current social movements² that are both rooted in long histories of resistance. For example, the past two decades of environmental justice organizing are connected to much older and larger movements, beginning with indigenous struggles to protect their lands and communities against European conquest, colonization and genocide. Similarly, current youth organizing is part of a long history of youth leadership in social change struggles around the world. For example, both the South African anti-apartheid movement and the Brazilian street children's movement are examples of successful youth-led social justice movements. In the U.S., youth leadership was integral to the civil rights and liberation struggles of the 1960s and 70s, including the American Indian Movement, the Black Liberation Movement, the Chicano Movement, the Filipino Movement, the Asian Pacific Islander Movement, the Women's Movement, the Queer Movement, the Disability Movement, etc.

Today's environmental justice and youth organizing movements are distinct yet continually intersecting parts of a larger social justice movement. To many, they are in fact inseparable. As members of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice summed it up:

We don't view environmental justice and youth organizing as two separate movements. In fact, they are tightly interrelated. For example, when our communities are confronted with issues of environmental racism, gentrification, etc. it impacts us as families. Our grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, children and community overall are impacted. For many of us we organize with our family, friends and community to confront issues of injustice.

Clearly there is a risk involved in trying to summarize the heart and soul of two dynamic movements to which so many devote their lives. However, we felt it was important to attempt to present an overview, to build understanding among those doing the work and those new to it. The chart on page 9 presents an overview of the environmental justice and youth organizing movements, with the history, key impacts, outcomes, practices, redefinitions, questions and challenges of each. The chart reveals how these movements are specific yet intertwined, and that organizing emerges strongly in specific forms, reflecting particular times and contexts.

For example, in the mid- to late 1990s, youth organizing in the U.S. underwent important qualitative shifts. Young people began to identify their struggles and unity based in the common experience of being young. Primarily in urban centers like the Bay Area and New York, young people began to organize themselves by their own principles, using their own cultural forms, for their own goals. They were catalyzed by increasing conservatism, anti-youth policies and stereotypes that especially impacted youth of color and immigrant youth. Much of the movement's success can already be felt in its efforts to heal generational differences, to bring new generations into movement leadership, and to work with complex intersections in multiracial and multiethnic contexts. Youth organizing has also found new ways to "walk the talk" – to match internal organizational structures and processes with external ones. Due to the nature of youth-oriented work, organizers and participants alike have also developed new ways to expand leadership in order to maintain organizational stability and sustainability.

² Movement Strategy Center uses the following definition of social movements by Aldon Morris, Sociology Professor at Northwestern University: "Social movements are relatively long-term organized efforts to change some major aspect of society or to prevent some form of change. Social movements usually involve a relatively large number of people, and these participants use unconventional means in their pursuit of social change. Social movements fight against what they perceive to be an injustice that needs to be changed."

Environmental justice organizing also emerged in a distinct form in the 1990s, although local groups had been organizing against pollution in communities of color for several decades. In the early part of the decade, the coining of the term “environmental racism” and the convening of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit were benchmarks of this growing social movement. One of its key contributions has been the redefinition of the terms “environment,” “justice” and “racism” in an era of dwindling legal and political avenues to claim collective rights. Another avenue of success has been the long-term and careful cultivation of strong working relationships that bring together the strengths of environmental, civil rights, labor and Native sovereignty movements’ perspectives, tactics and resources.

Both the environmental justice and youth organizing movements challenge exclusive definitions of expertise. Experts are no longer limited to scientists, planners and policymakers with master’s degrees and PhDs but include single mothers, young people, people of color, immigrants with limited English proficiency and community members. Intersectional analysis is also a strong feature of both movements: environmental justice integrates race and class analyses, and youth organizing incorporates a broad array of issues including age, race, gender, class, sexuality and ability. Overall, the environmental justice movement offers an analytical framework within which to understand the interrelated causes of injustice. The youth organizing movement offers a concentration on and commitment to building inclusive, sustainable organizations and models of social change, so that organizations’ external goals match their internal structures and dynamics. As a result, youth organizing in the environmental justice movement has the possibility of bringing together several dynamic movements for social change and justice under a broad umbrella framework.

The birth of this report

Movement Strategy Center (MSC) served as the home for the research process that culminated in this report. MSC provides organizational capacity building, power mapping, collective visioning tools, field research and alliance building facilitation for groups and individual leaders. The organization is committed to advancing the next generation of leaders for a sustainable progressive movement. As a movement-building intermediary, MSC has developed strong relationships, new insights, useful documents and resources in the area of youth organizing. MSC has also played a vital role in identifying, exploring and clarifying the relationship between youth organizing and larger movement building. The Ford Foundation approached MSC to document the role of youth in the environmental justice movement, partly with the goal of attracting new funders to this important work. We saw the opportunity to inform the funding strategy of a major philanthropic institution, but also to provide information, analysis and reflection to people and organizations involved in the day-to-day work of organizing disenfranchised communities for social change.

As the first step in this process, MSC assembled a team of three diverse individuals who could bring both an environmental justice and a youth organizing perspective to the effort, as well as experience in developing useful reports for both community groups and funders. The authors conducted interviews and site visits with 40 people in 27 organizations and 15 states. The writers looked for groups that represent a broad range of racial and ethnic communities, as well as groups doing multiracial and multiethnic work. Unfortunately, we were not able to reach all of the groups we tried to contact. Additionally, the authors interviewed 10 individuals in foundations that provide funding to environmental justice, environmental or youth programs, and sought input and advice from several other individuals who hold important knowledge in the environmental justice movement.

The scope of this report

This is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of all groups involved with youth environmental justice work; rather, it is a scan that captures a diversity of experiences and stories within the field. We focused primarily on new organizing strategies and processes, rather than campaign goals, outcomes and impacts. However, it is important to note that through these processes, groups are able to achieve outcomes that they could not achieve any other way.

The authors focused on the following questions:

1. How and why are environmental justice groups integrating youth leadership and intergenerational alliances into their work?
2. How are they expanding leadership and supporting individual and organizational transitions?
3. How are youth environmental justice organizers using new strategies that expand and connect issue areas and communities?
4. How is the environmental justice movement finding new ways to regenerate and sustain itself?
5. How do young grassroots leaders and relevant funders think this intersection would best be resourced and supported?

The findings in the next two sections tell the full story of what we learned through our research. In summary, we found that youth organizing and leadership development are bringing new life and possibility to the environmental justice movement, reshaping organizing strategies and building new forms of facilitative leadership. Groups are using diverse definitions of “youth” that prioritize community needs and organizing strategies. Similarly, organizers are conducting both youth-led and intergenerational work in ways that overlap but ultimately prioritize community well-being.

Political education helps young people become leaders and organizers, and is widely used as a foundation for developing critical thinking skills and analysis, campaign development and research, base building and outreach, and strengthening traditional ways of life. Of equal importance, organizers are summoning the power of arts and culture to engage youth in the movement, reach the hearts of community members, inspire dialogue around divisive topics, and build community. Political education and cultural work are part of the broad range of long-term youth development supports being provided by youth environmental justice organizations.

As the first few generations of highly skilled young leaders emerge, transitions for young organizers are a great concern. Organizations are creating program structures and curricula to help young people prepare for their future and stay involved in the movement. Networks and training institutes are helping young people make transitions, as well as break a sense of isolation, share resources, expand their worldview and develop connections to broader movements. Finally, we found that youth leadership development work is often part of an intentional shift toward healing on an intergenerational and community level. These new forms of holistic, transformational organizing are building a stronger, more sustainable social justice movement.

Youth organizing in the environmental justice movement – and the amazing contributions young people bring to social justice work – offer just one powerful example of where a movement’s “growing pains” can ultimately lead.

Key Definitions

Adulthood: the interpersonal, cultural, and structural oppression of young people by adults. It is based on the belief that adults are better than young people, and therefore entitled to dominate them or represent them without their agreement. Adulthood is characterized by disrespect, negligence or abuse of the intelligence, judgment, emotional life, leadership, or physical being of young people.

Environmental Justice: the movement led by communities of color against environmental racism, and for sustainable, self-determined and just communities.

Environmental Racism: the set of structures, institutions, practices and ideas that produces unhealthy, poisoned environments, concentrated in low-income communities and communities of color worldwide.

Intergenerational Organization/Program: organizations in which youth and adults play active leadership roles at all levels of the organization, from the membership to staff and board. Most intergenerational organizations have strong leadership development components to support the growth of all their members, and to help youth and adults work together as peers.

Leadership Expansion: the process of supporting leaders of all ages to grow and change their role/s in the movement, as their skills, needs and interests change. **“New” leadership** does not only refer to the engagement of totally new individuals, but also to a continuation and expansion of leadership in which members of all ages can move into new leadership roles within an organization and/or in the movement. **Leadership transition** is sometimes used to refer to generational transitions, especially from Civil Rights leadership to the “hip-hop” generation within an organization, but we prefer the use of the term “leadership expansion” as described above.

Racism: the interpersonal, cultural, and structural oppression of people of color by white people, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining wealth, power and privilege. Racism is based on the belief that people of European descent are inherently superior to people of color, and therefore have a right to dominate them. **Structural Racism** refers to the way in which political, economic, cultural and civic institutions interact to maintain racial hierarchies and inequitable racial group outcomes.

Youth Development: the natural process through which all young people seek to meet their physical, social and cultural needs and to build the knowledge, relationships and skills necessary to succeed in adolescence and adulthood. It includes the growing capacity of young people to understand and actively participate in their political, social, cultural, and physical environment. Youth development is based on the belief that youth are people with assets to be developed, not problems to be solved.

Youth-led Organization/Program: an organization or program in which youth are in all major leadership roles, including executive director, and have majority membership on boards of directors, with appropriate support from adult allies. Youth led does not necessarily mean no adult involvement; adults play important ally roles. Youth driven refers to an organization or program in which youth have substantive, meaningful roles in leadership positions, including governance and programming.

Youth Organizers: young people who are organizers. Also may refer to the core membership of a youth organizing group. **Note:** People apply this term differently. Some use it for adults or young adults who are organizing young people, as opposed to youth who are conducting organizing. We choose to use the second meaning, because it treats youth as the subjects, and not the objects, in organizing.

Youth Organizing: organizing that is led and conducted by young people; organizing where young people are the community or base that is being organized.

**Overview of
Environmental Justice (EJ)
Movement History**

EJ is rooted in a long history of resistance, beginning with indigenous people’s struggles to protect their lands and communities against European conquest, colonization and genocide. EJ is also linked to the civil rights and freedom movements of the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

- **1970s:** Contemporary U.S. EJ movement emerges with grassroots organizing in communities of color against pollutants and toxins. Development of environmental justice as a coherent, articulated frame, drawing on parts of anti-toxics, civil rights, Native sovereignty and labor movements.
- **1980s - 90s:** Mainstream environmentalism narrows to conservation and endangered species protection work, and away from labor/health/ social justice issues.
- **1991:** Summit I challenges mainstream environmental groups to deal with internal racism.
- **1990s:** Strong community base-building put into practice after Summit I; huge increase in people and groups doing EJ work.
- **2002:** Fruition of base-building phase visible at Summit II. Over 1400 participants (strong community, youth and international presence), greater leadership capacity, diversity of issues addressed.

Key Impacts and Outcomes

- Grassroots communities fighting toxic facilities connect with each other and win bigger victories.
- EJ organizations and networks become anchors for social justice work in many communities.
- Through EJ work, community members, students and environmental professionals increase their power, political analysis and involvement in the larger social change movement.
- Greater understanding of race, class and other systems of power and privilege among mainstream environmental movement.

**Overview of
Youth Organizing (YO)
Movement History**

YO is based in a tradition of strong youth leadership in all social change movements around the world, including the U.S. civil rights and liberation movements of the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

- **1980s - 90s:** The contemporary U.S. youth movement emerges, characterized by:
 - Powerful response to a wave of conservative policy attacks and media messages that criminalize and scapegoat youth of color and immigrant youth.
 - Challenging older generations of activists and filling a break in the cycle of intergen-erational mentorship within social justice movements. Young leaders start new orga-nizations to address issues in their communities and mentor each other through the process.
 - Strong, socially conscious youth cultural movements (such as hip-hop) come of age, infusing the youth movement with vitality.
- **Early 1990s:** Grassroots youth-led and youth-driven projects, organizations and cultural movements emerge.
- **Mid 1990s:** Groups begin to identify as part of a youth movement; intermediaries emerge to support the movement.

- **Late 1990s - now:** Youth organizers mature and youth organizing intersects with and influences other movements and sectors (i.e., environmental, media and criminal justice). Resources are organized to support the work.

Key Impacts and Outcomes

- Greater investment in schools; resistance to school privatization; changes to school curricula to reflect students’ diverse communities.
- Reduced spending on juvenile incarceration, protests of police brutality and challenges to policies and media representations that criminalize youth, especially youth of color.

- Executive Order 12898 requires federal agencies to consider environmental justice in policy implementation. More than 30 states enact similar legislation.

Key Practices

- Communities speak and organize for themselves.
- Groups recognize and support community members as experts and leaders; decenter the role of professionals as leaders.
- Organizers hold agencies accountable to community participation processes.
- Organizers develop and implement community-led, community-driven processes to engage with scientists, policymakers and decision makers.
- Groups value diversity in issue areas, communities, approaches and structures.

Redefinitions

- Recapturing the broad definition of the **environment** as where we live, work, learn, play and worship.
- Recognizing the diverse origins of **environmentalism** to include people acting to protect all kinds of environments, not just far away “wild” areas and endangered species.
- Defining **justice** to include both outcomes and processes.
- Underscoring the definition of **racism** as not only individualized, intentional discriminatory practices, but also the set of historical, institutional, social and cultural processes that create and reinforce group-differentiated outcomes and vulnerabilities.

- Increased investment in healthcare, social services and youth development programs. Increased resources and youth input into public youth programs.
- Greater awareness of adultism and youth empowerment in the broader social justice movement and the public at large. Shift in negative perceptions of young people and focus on leadership expansion in social movements, including space for young leaders.

Key Practices

- Youth speak and organize for themselves.
- Groups recognize and support young people as experts and leaders; decenter the role of adults as leaders.
- Organizers develop intersection of issues and analysis. Strong focus on anti-racism while also integrating analysis of gender, sexuality, class, ability and national status.
- Holistic models of organizing.
- Communities focus on intergenerational healing through positively shifting youth-adult dynamics, relationships and roles.
- Organizers create new models of leadership development and expansion.
- Groups value diversity in issue areas, constituents, approaches and structures.

Redefinitions

- Redefining **youth** and **young people** as a constituency that needs to be organized.
- Defining **age** and **adultism** as factors in institutional and interpersonal power, privilege and oppression.
- Defining **justice** to include both outcomes and processes.
- Linking movement **sustainability** with organizational and individual sustainability and well-being.
- Redefining/reframing **organizing** to include personal development and community building, as well as campaigns and base building. Focusing on community-specific organizing models.

Big Questions and Challenges

- What should be the role of “professionals” vs. “non-professionals”? Are professionals willing to take leadership from the grassroots?
- How should resources be distributed and organized?
- How can groups balance a need for “wins” on urgent, narrow issues with a need for a broad, cross-issue, proactive vision and strategy that reflects community experiences.
- What should be the relationship between local community work and regional coordination?
- Will different strands of the movement work together nationally, and if so, how?
- How will the EJ movement sustain and regenerate itself?

Big Questions and Challenges

- How should we measure the successes of youth organizing?
- What is the relationship to adult professionals, given needs, for example, for technical expertise?
- What is the role of adults and the nature of the movement as young people age out of youth organizations?
- What is the relationship of the youth movement to other social movements? Is it a sustainable movement in itself, or a movement that always intersects and impacts other movements?
- How will the YO movement sustain and regenerate itself?

Findings From the Field



Even though there are a lot of stereotypes of youth as slackers, young people hold a big sense of hope and possibility. They are able to have an idea and make it come alive. It's often older people who say that something can't happen. It's a generational issue of young people needing to take the reins and move it.

— Yuki Kidokoro, Communities for a Better Environment

Finding 1. Youth organizing in the environmental justice movement is transforming strategies of organizing and leadership

Youth organizing and leadership development are bringing new life and possibility to the environmental justice movement, reshaping the ways we organize, and building new forms of facilitative leadership. We found that youth organizers are often able to:

- Employ direct tactics and take risks
- Act as community messengers to disenfranchised communities
- Make new connections between issues
- Shift the culture within their organizations to be fun, learning based and sustainable

Young people and their allies are also building new forms of facilitative leadership that empower all members of their organizations and communities, expand their leadership, and create greater sustainability.

Youth organizers as risk takers

In many instances, young people are able to confront corporations and local governments more directly than adult organizers. These dynamics are especially present in rural and indigenous communities, where the economic base is frequently less diversified than in urban areas. For instance, Appalshop is a multidisciplinary arts and education center in Whitesburg, Kentucky, the heart of Appalachia. Nick Szuberla, an Appalshop media artist, explained that in confronting coal companies in their region:

A lot of the time young people are taking the lead in the community because their jobs and livelihoods can't be threatened. They can speak more boldly.

The Black Mesa Water Coalition on the Diné (Navajo) and Hopi reservations, in northeastern Arizona, also organizes around coal mining issues. Young adult organizers from the Coalition spoke about how elders in their community came to appreciate the radical role that youth are able to play in community change:

There's a lot of power in being a youth organization. You can get away with a little more in the community. You're forgiven for some things, for maybe some radical ideas, and sometimes we've been asked by our older organizations to lead the more radical [fights] because they just can't do it. So that's using your place – where you and your organization are – in a strategic way.

— Enei Begaye, Black Mesa Water Coalition

Young people as community messengers

Some organizations believe youth organizing is so important that they use money from their general fund to support it; this is in part because they recognize that young people provide an entry point into the communities they are seeking to organize, particularly immigrant communities. For instance, when adults are working two or more jobs, young people are more able to participate in organizing. By working with youth, environmental justice organizations are able to engage with or at least get their message and information out to families and older community members.

For example, at the River Ambassadors Program of Lowell, Massachusetts, young people are the main way public health information gets out to families in the Cambodian-American community. In the case of rural communities, young people or people in college may be the best way to get a message out to many communities over a large area. In rural Appalachia, because young people use technologies such as cell phones and the internet more actively, youth organizing can produce a higher turnout for events. In some Native communities, working with the few young people who go to college allows groups to network and build community among multiple generations.

Youth are often the most effective way to reach other youth. As Jennifer Alcantar of Grayson Neighborhood Council explained about tabling and outreach in the San Joaquin Valley of California:

Sometimes younger people see older people and they don't really listen. But if a younger person goes up to them, they'll listen.

Grassroots organizations with youth organizing components often find themselves becoming an important community hub. As former youth members age out or graduate from youth programs, they still come around and help out in between the demands of jobs and family. These become institutions that then benefit the entire community.

Additionally, organizers are finding that young people can actually inspire other family members to participate in the work.

When young people are participating and active in the organization, they give other family members, especially their mothers, the courage to do organizing and community development. They feel okay about their participation because they're not away from their kids while they are doing it and they're doing something that enhances their kids' learning.

— Norma Seledon, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization

Youth organizing shifts organizational culture

Beyond campaigns, young people are also helping environmental justice organizations to transform their organizing models and organizational cultures. Young people expect workshops and projects to be engaging and accessible; as a result, they push staff to make learning, healing and fun a central part of the work. This is true in many groups, including Communities for a Better Environment of Southern California. Their youth program, Youth EJ, actually established the organizing systems and tools that are now used by the entire organization. In the words of an adult organizer from Grayson Neighborhood Council, “Icebreakers and games are not just for the kids!”

Youth environmental justice work can also push organizations toward more sustainable models of organizing that are based on community building and personal development, as much as specific campaigns. In other organizations, program staff also spoke about how youth help to normalize a “culture of learning.” Youth also play an important leadership role in healing intergenerational rifts. Because they are sometimes more hopeful and open to change, youth are often able to help bridge old conflicts and bring communities together.

Youth organizing expands and cross-fertilizes organizing issues

Across the progressive movement, organizers are recognizing that cross-issue and cross-community strategizing is crucial to increasing collective impact. Youth organizing reflects this larger strategy of connecting issues and embracing broader frameworks.

For example, in some multi-issue organizations, like UPROSE (United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park), young people are responsible for bringing an environmental justice focus to the work, and connecting the organization to the larger environmental justice movement.

Basically, some young people from Sunset Park went to Elizabeth, the Executive Director of UPROSE, and said that they wanted to do what she did, which was organize around social and environmental justice issues. So, she trained them to do that and they named themselves the Environmental Enforcers. Over the years, different EJ campaigns started to pop up, mostly initiated by the young people. As a result of that, UPROSE became an intergenerational organization actively involved in the environmental justice movement.

— Irene Shen, UPROSE

In other cases, youth organizers are responsible for expanding the scope of their organization's already existing environmental justice work. Within these organizations, youth organizers have initiated campaigns around juvenile justice, education, housing and community health, using an environmental justice frame.

This is true of the Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project, a program of Alternatives for Community and Environment in Boston, where youth are organizing around transportation justice.

We went into schools where asthma was a major concern; diesel buses were a major asthma trigger. So youth started to organize in the schools for MBTA to switch to cleaner fuels. Throughout the years, in the T Riders Union, young people have played a key role in fighting fare increases, etc.

— Jodi Sugarman-Brozan, Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project

Youth organizers in neighborhood based environmental justice groups are also responding to local needs that do not fit neatly into an environmental justice frame. For example, in North Carolina, youth in the ARMS (“Ayudame a Realizar Mis Sueños” or “Help Me to Reach My Dreams”) program of Tri-County Community Health Center use a youth-led process to identify the issues they want to address. Issues recently selected include tobacco use among youth and the national Dream Act that aims to extend citizenship to immigrant students. Youth organizers at Little Village Environmental Justice Organization in Chicago have initiated community forums to deal with issues like military recruitment in schools.

Building new forms of facilitative leadership

As an organizer, the job is to organize yourself out of a job – to pass on the baton so that the younger people have those critical thinking skills and analysis skills. The job is mentoring and helping bring forth new leaders.

— Yalonda Sinde, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice

Organizations are realizing that in order to survive, they need to focus on leadership expansion. They must set up structures and programs that consistently develop and engage new, revolving leadership. These “new” leaders are not always new to the work or to the organization; they may be individuals of any age who are empowered to step into new positions of leadership. In addition, groups must build more inclusive and equitable power structures within their organizations so that they are not just transitioning new people into the same roles in the same oppressive systems.

One of the key ways that youth environmental justice organizations are expanding their leadership is by adopting facilitative, broad-based leadership structures. Facilitative leadership is a model in which the “leader” acts more as a facilitator than a decision maker, guiding and supporting the group to work together and make decisions. The goal of a facilitative leader is to bring out the leadership potential of the group – both the individuals in it and the whole – and to make sure all the parts work together cohesively.

Creating structures that challenge oppression and expand leadership

Many organizations reflected on their negative experiences with oppressive, top-down leadership, which often led to burning out or shutting out young organizers. As a result, some organizations consciously switched to facilitative leadership structures. In the case of PODER (People Organized in the Defense of Earth and her Resources) in Texas, staff organizers found that they had been operating from a model of leadership that had been passed down to them from male leaders. The founders realized that the “normal” model of focusing on one or two charismatic leaders at the top actually left their organization vulnerable over the long term. It also created a climate of burnout and isolation. As they were planning for a leadership transition, they had a hard time finding a young organizer who was able or even wanted to fill their shoes.

As a result, they switched to a model that emphasizes building leadership across the organization, in which people at every level have the responsibility to teach, lead, and learn.

Organizational leadership challenges often reflect critical power issues around gender, age, etc. Several of the groups interviewed have examined the way power dynamics play out inside their communities and created structures to support the leadership of youth, women, immigrants and others who are often silenced. For instance, the Laotian Organizing Project works specifically with young women to counteract gender dynamics that often prevent women from taking leadership in their community. Other organizations are supporting the leadership of youth involved in street economies and the juvenile justice system. By empowering marginalized constituencies, groups are actualizing a fundamental principle of environmental justice work: that the people who are most impacted by environmental injustice should also lead the organizing.

Flexible structures support facilitative leadership

Flexibility emerged as another theme in organizations with facilitative leadership structures. Being flexible helps organizations adapt and grow to their changing circumstances. Youth programs within environmental justice and community organizations, as well as youth-led and staffed organizations, often have flexible structures because of the inherent changing nature of the youth category, or because many programs are only one to a few years long. Many organizations have also shifted their membership and program structures to accommodate families' changing demands for young people's participation. This sometimes means changing meeting times and frequencies to reflect the realities of parents' concerns or other issues.

Sometimes organizations change their structure to support youth members' participation and leadership as they age out of being "youth." This can include changing their staff structure in order to best use staff members' particular expertise and leadership skills. For instance, when the organization is committed to hiring a youth and/or community member with a specific skill set, other staff might be brought on to support or complement the strengths of that individual, so that the composition of the team is complete.

Youth Organizers Connect Environmental Justice to Economic Justice

Economic and environmental justice are linked together in many communities. In urban communities, issues of gentrification, employment and land use have led several organizing groups to engage in community development projects alongside their environmental justice work. In rural and reservation communities, the main employer in the region is often the same company that is responsible for the environmental injustices impacting the community. These communities find that in order to address environmental justice issues, they also need to create plans for a more sustainable, diversified economy.

Many urban neighborhood based groups are mapping community assets and creating local land use plans, sometimes expanding beyond their neighborhoods, to establish community participation for entire cities or regions. These projects often develop out of a lack of public investment in the community and/or a threat of gentrification.

By taking charge of planning processes in their own neighborhoods, community groups can help to dramatically shift the power dynamics between community members, planners and city officials. Through mapping the assets of their community, youth and adult organizers at Little Village Environmental Justice Organization in Chicago discovered their neighborhood was one of the largest grossing retail centers in the city, second only to upscale Michigan Avenue. This awareness increased their confidence to move forward in their community planning process and to make demands on the city for services such as clean and equitable transportation. As leaders, planners and participants, young people were an important part of the entire process of community assets mapping. Ultimately, this process empowered individual organizers to see themselves as leaders in their communities and beyond.

In several tribal and rural communities, youth organizers are working to shift the whole local economic base in order to address the root issues in their communities. This shift includes decreasing dependency on fossil fuel use. Members of Black Mesa Water Coalition are building energy-efficient earth homes and working to create alternative economies on the Hopi and Diné reservations to counteract their communities' dependence on coal mining jobs. Their organizing is based on this analysis.

We began to see that it's all related. [We were] going to meetings saying that this coal company is destroying people's lives, when the coal company provides eighty percent of the Hopi Tribal Government's revenues. We need to transition our Hopi Tribal Government's economic source to something more sustainable.

— Enei Begaye, Black Mesa Water Coalition

Youth in Appalshop and Lakota Action Network (LAN) are also working to decrease their communities' dependence on coal mining. Appalshop does trainings at community development corporations to train residents on using media arts as a community planning tool; they also support micro-enterprise projects. LAN developed a sustainable energy project in order to increase tribal sovereignty and independence. However, Nick Tilsen, LAN's Director, acknowledged that this type of work can also be harder to sustain than crisis-driven organizing, because it usually takes years of unpaid organizing to achieve such long-term goals.



**Our “next generation”
is multigenerational.**

— Tammy Bang Luu,
Bus Riders Union

Finding 2. Environmental justice organizations forge definitions of “youth” that reflect their communities and organizing strategies

Who comprises the “youth” category? Within the youth organizing and youth development fields, the definition of youth is dynamic, often changing depending on the situation and community. Some organizers define youth as under 18, others under 21, and others under 30. Internationally, the working definition of “youth” is people under 35. As in the youth organizing field more generally, environmental justice organizations are using diverse definitions of youth to guide their work.

Some organizations specifically work with high school age youth. Many of these organizations make this decision based on the analysis that young people under 18 are particularly marginalized politically. Others target high school students because there is a lack of resources and programs to support high school age youth in their communities. Many of these groups set up youth programs or school-based clubs to support their youth organizers.

There is a particular disenfranchisement of youth who are in high school. If you are under 18, you don't have a lot of

rights. But they can still have a high impact and they are still in the community where they grew up. It's harder to do this kind of organizing with college youth.

— Carla Perez, Communities for a Better Environment

Other groups define youth based on their community standards.

A lot of people say a youth is 30 or under. For Native people youth can be 40. It's really for you to self-identify. Although around 30, people start moving on. You're a youth until you've got about three kids.

— Enei Begaye, Black Mesa Water Coalition

Some groups find that given their organizing strategies, working with youth under age 18 is difficult and creates liability issues. Instead, they invest heavily in leadership development of young people ages 18 to 30 years old. Other groups, like Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, organize families and have young people ages 6 through 25 involved. Norrie Robbins of the Explorer's Club in San Diego, California addressed the advantages of working with younger children:

I really do work at the 6- to 12-year-old range, because you really have to fall in love early. There are other members of the community who will fill in that next thought process. But you have to get interested first. You can't get them at high school. You can't get them at middle school. You have to open them up at that early age.

Still other organizations are focused on expanding "new" leadership in their entire community.

Our "next generation" is multigenerational. Some of our new leaders are as old as 70. We see them as new leaders because they are new to organizing. Others come to the work at 17 and 18 years old.

— Tammy Bang Luu, Bus Riders Union



The trend is not just about the youth. It's about how we develop the skills of all our people.

— Teresa Almaguer, PODER (CA)

Finding 3. Youth environmental justice work can take an intergenerational form and a youth-led form; and both are important and complementary

What is intergenerational organizing and how does it relate to youth-led organizing? Often, observers will view intergenerational organizing as the opposite of youth-led organizing. However, both methods are important and complementary. For example, the protests at Summit II (recounted in the Introduction) illustrate the need for both approaches. Two young adults on the Summit II Planning Committee, Ché Lopez (Southwest Workers Union) and Geri Almanza (PODER, CA), emphasized that the demand for stronger youth engagement and support included a desire for the mentorship and presence of elders.

Most of the groups featured in this report are doing both intergenerational and youth-led organizing. The real question is: To what degree are groups prioritizing youth leadership and intergenerational alliances in their work, and how are they doing it?

What are “intergenerational” and “youth-led” organizations?

Intergenerational organizations are groups that link elders, adults and youth in a common cause. Young people and adults both have roles in the organization’s projects, campaigns and decision making. Often they are community-based organizations. Partly because of their focus on empowering all community members, many intergenerational organizations have a strong commitment to young people’s leadership and leadership development.

Youth-led and youth-driven organizations are groups that prioritize and support youth involvement in decision making at all levels of the organization³. Youth-led organizing is driven by young people’s decisions. Many organizations have youth-led programs or projects within intergenerational organizations. Most, if not all, youth-led organizations have adult and elder allies who help guide their work.

How and why groups choose an intergenerational form

When our communities are confronted with issues of environmental racism, gentrification, etc., it impacts us as families....The EJ movement is a people of color led movement and is based on our cultural experiences, traditions and history of conquest and colonization. Our models of organizing are based on indigenous ways and the family, stressing the importance of intergenerational organizing.

— Bianca Encinias, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice

Sometimes organizations make an intentional transition from being adult led to choosing an intergenerational form. In other cases, intergenerational organizing emerges organically from deeper values and traditions about how communities come together to enact change. For some groups, although they are not specifically focused on youth development, community organizing must include youth, since youth are integrally part of the community. For these organizations, developing young people’s leadership abilities goes side-by-side with developing the skills and leadership of adult members of the organization and the community. Teresa Almaguer, organizer from PODER (People Organizing to Demand Environmental & Economic Rights) in California, summed up the motivation behind intergenerational organizing, “The trend is not just about the youth. It’s about how we develop the skills of all our people.”

The Bus Riders Union (BRU) in Los Angeles, California is one example of an organization that has always integrated young people into decision making and leadership at every level. This structure maximizes the development of young people and supports intergenerational learning and relationships. The BRU facilitates leadership development by supporting members to take on whole pieces of work, starting with small projects like flyers and building up to leading campaigns and playing other leadership roles in the organization. Their commitment to leadership development, intergenerational multiracial culture, and transformational organizing enables this model to work.

Many organizers also described the capacity of intergenerational organizing to both bring out and heal adultism within organizations. For example, adults often hold negative stereotypes about youth. They may feel that their experience has taught them the right way to do things, and they don’t want to listen to younger people. Young people also may feel that they don’t have anything to gain by listening to and building relationships with older folks. These divisions are increased by institutionalized adultism, or systemic oppression of young people, within our society and organizations.

³ Young Wisdom Project of the Movement Strategy Center. (2004) *Making Space, Making Change: Profiles of Youth-Led and Youth-Driven Organizations*. Oakland, CA: Movement Strategy Center.

However, working with young people often challenges and counteracts young people's and adults' negative stereotypes of youth. For instance, Nia Robinson, formerly of Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice and Climate Justice Corps described:

Youth, especially youth of color, are dealing with so much sh--. Every day we are told how unimportant we are – in the school system, city services – so we start to believe it. We have to counter those beliefs inside the movement...Elders need to let go of their egos. We should set out to build an army of youth as amazing and dynamic as they are. Don't worry about them outshining older organizers. The work is important and it will help us build the movement together.

Southern Echo, a statewide intermediary that supports community organizing efforts in the Mississippi Delta, uses an intergenerational model of community organizing. Mike Sayer of Southern Echo emphasized that intergenerational work actually helps to sustain movements over time:

The intergenerational model of work is key to the process [of organizing] to avoid the roller coaster of successes and collapses of the labor and civil rights or freedom movements.

Learning community and movement history from real people enables youth organizers to put their organizing in a larger historical context. In addition, it is both empowering and healing for adults and youth to realize that they can enjoy learning from each other.

How and why youth-led programs evolve

One of the key successes of youth-led organizations is their ability to shift the relationship dynamics between youth and adults. Youth-led organizing always involves some level of collaboration with adults, but provides an opportunity for youth to become agents of change, and for adults to act as allies. This is often part of a larger community healing process that may also include intergenerational organizing.

There are many reasons why groups may choose a youth-led form, including:

- To create opportunities for older youth to learn how to be mentors by working with younger youth
- To build organizations that are more reflective of current issues and cultures, and that are more able to experiment with new organizing strategies and models
- To provide a non-adultist organizing space that prioritizes young people's agency
- To establish a youth space or program in under-resourced communities that may not have other youth-focused services
- To mobilize youth activists who may be the most able to address community issues

Similarly to intergenerational organizations, groups become youth led in a variety of ways, including being established as youth led and transitioning to this form through crisis and/or opportunity.

Organizations founded as youth-led

Youth United for Community Action (YUCA) exemplifies an organization that has combined youth organizing and environmental justice since its inception. Oscar Flores, YUCA's Director, described the structure of their Higher Learning program, which works with high school youth, and how that structure has developed over time:

We have tiers of how youth are engaged. When they first come in as volunteers or regular members,

they come in when they can, go to events or workshops. Through that we hope they want to become core members: stipended youth who work for three to five hours a week. The core members have full decision making power in the campaign. They do most of the campaign work, strategy implementation and evaluation. Then core members can become organizing interns in a 6 month internship. They gain more skills, like how to do videos, all the different skills. Another tier is the youth organizer: they're in charge of maintaining and recruiting membership and organizational development. A new one is the senior core: these are youth that have been part of the program for several years. It wasn't planned that way, that's how it happened. They are youth who have a lot of experience. The senior core gives them an opportunity to engage more and be compensated, to be supporters, like the role of staff.

Youth organizing programs emerge from within adult-led organizations

Sometimes youth leadership develops organically from within a larger organization. For example, youth may come to meetings with family members or other adults, and eventually someone sees that they need to be intentionally integrated into the work or to have their own space. This perception sometimes arises from a youth empowerment point of view and sometimes because of tensions with adult organizing.

Ysaura Rodriguez, an adult ally at ARMS (“Ayudame a Realizar Mis Sueños” or “Help Me to Reach My Dreams”) described their process:

I was participating at the Latino Forum every year. Two of my children suddenly said, “It’s just for adults, we don’t have anything to do.” “Well,” I said, “there’s more children, why don’t you do something?” They said they wanted to have a forum for the youth. They started talking to other youth in other communities and they started to form their own groups. Now we have groups all over the state. We started with six teenagers and now I think they plan on gathering over 300. They teach the community, especially their peers, about tobacco prevention and STD prevention.

At the Lakota Action Network, some elders actually advised youth organizers to create a separate, youth-led organization so that they could maintain a space for youth to take leadership in their community. Based on their community context, they realized this was the best way for youth to complement adult organizing. In this group, adult allies sit on advisory boards, but are not part of decision making. One challenge of this model is that young adult leaders in organizations are sometimes under great pressure to perform, and lack the established reputation of movement leaders, which may make them less likely to take politically risky stances.

The younger the organizers, the more necessary youth-specific space becomes within organizations. Groups organizing young people under 18 often find that having youth-only space and youth-led campaigns is critical for young people’s development. Many groups create separate youth programs within their organizations, campus-based clubs, or family-based organizations. Providing some youth-only space for high school organizers is important in that it creates a learning environment to support young people’s social and political development, to foster a sense of safety for the families of youth organizers, and to allow high school youth to conduct youth-initiated projects and campaigns that the rest of the organization takes on. Ultimately, this helps youth to develop the skills, analysis and confidence to organize as equals with adult members.

The 15% Solution That Benefits Everyone: Moving from Mainstream Environmental Organizing to Environmental Justice

A small shift in the investment of resources can broaden the focus of a mainstream environmental organization, and make a dramatic impact on environmental justice work. The following story of Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA) illustrates how the holistic strategies of environmental justice lead to deeper impacts and greater long-term change. AYEA was a group with a mainstream environmental focus that naturally shifted to an environmental justice focus over time. As a result, they have expanded resources for environmental justice work on a statewide and national level and now see themselves as a model inside the larger national organization.

In 1998, the Alaska Women's Environmental Network, an organization composed primarily of white women, held their annual conference. In an attempt to increase young women's representation at the event, the Network supported the convening of a youth caucus, which led to the founding of Alaska Youth for Environmental Action. AYEA eventually became a separate, youth-driven program within a mainstream environmental organization, the National Wildlife Federation.

AYEA's mission was "to inspire, educate and take action on environmental issues facing our communities." However, when the current program director compared the mission statement with the organization's membership, she realized they needed to expand to include the full diversity of Alaska's population. To move toward this fundamental change, AYEA began to build long-term relationships with people and organizations in Alaska's communities of color. The group also shifted its membership structure to become more flexible in order to meet the needs of different segments of the youth population.

Today AYEA is a statewide network of high school chapters, organizational affiliates and individual youth representing Native communities, white communities, and Pacific Islander immigrant communities. Over 40% of AYEA's members are rural and Native Alaskan youth. AYEA has advocated within the statewide environmental community to create positions for and promote AYEA youth, including getting youth members on the boards of mainstream environmental organizations. Their current activities and goals include training youth to lead locally, providing direct civic engagement experiences, connecting youth to organizations and opportunities, and building a diverse network of activists.

The organization is growing in new directions, such as expanding issue areas to include issues brought in by youth of color, learning to deconstruct white privilege, working on creating inclusive group dynamics and building long-term, trusting relationships in a multiracial and multiethnic setting. Some of the challenges include understanding how the experiences of urban immigrant youth relate to rural Native and white youths' experiences of the environment; and creating a space where youth of very different social, cultural and economic backgrounds are able to fully participate.

As a program of the National Wildlife Federation, AYEА receives a small but stabilizing percentage of their budget from the national group, and they are able to access networks and other resources that would usually be unavailable to a small environmental justice group. The National Wildlife Federation gains a relationship with a diverse group of young activists that can provide current and future leadership, and is infusing new energy and issues into social change organizing.

This mutually beneficial relationship offers a valuable model for other organizations and funders. For the environmental movement as a whole to find deep solutions to the ecological crisis, mainstream environmental organizations need to invest at least 15% of their existing resources to support environmental justice strategies. Funders seeking to increase the impact of environmental justice can continue to make the greatest impact by supporting organizations at the heart of the environmental justice movement. However, funders also have an opportunity to encourage mainstream environmental organizations to shift a percentage of their existing resources toward environmental justice work.



“ Once given the opportunity to learn, once its real to them, se quedan inquietos, eh? [they become restless, hungry to learn]”

— Ysaura Rodriguez, ARMS program of Tri-County Community Health Center

Finding 4. Youth environmental justice work is deeply grounded in political education

Youth environmental justice groups identified political education as one of the key tools to help young people become leaders and organizers. Interviewees identified several key reasons for doing political education:

- To develop critical thinking skills and analysis
- To conduct research and develop campaigns
- To do base building and outreach
- To increase skills and build capacity
- To strengthen traditional ways of life

Groups are using diverse strategies for political education, including: power mapping, peer exchanges and site visits to other organizations, training institutes and conferences, toxic tours of their communities, community history, and workshops in schools. Many groups develop their own curriculum to reflect the particular concerns of their communities. Often, this process involves borrowing and translating trainings from other environmental justice groups. Many groups mentioned the work of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice; the School of Unity and Liberation; and the Highlander Center’s summer training programs and gatherings for youth leaders.

Developing critical thinking skills and analysis

Through education and political development young people can understand and navigate their world. In many cases, youth organizations are filling in for the inadequacies of public schools by developing young people's critical and analytical thinking skills, as well as their awareness of history and current events. Several organizers described it as a decolonization process.

We're offering an alternative worldview that youth don't get from TV, schools or families, because families work all the time. So, [we are] creating that alternative worldview of how we have a history of organizing and how we've gained those rights because of organizing, as workers, as youth.

—Teresa Almaguer, PODER (People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights), California

Ma'at Youth Academy is based in Richmond, California, a predominantly African American community with an under-resourced school system. This organization combines mainstream environmental education with an environmental justice and sustainable communities perspective in its program, Community and Global Ecology (CGE). CGE has partnered with high school science teachers throughout the Northern Bay Area, as well as developed curriculum for elementary and middle school students, after school programs and summer programs. Young people involved with Ma'at Youth Academy have conducted surveys on fish consumption, and on community and environmental health, as well as participated in activities designed to supplement and improve science and math education in the Richmond area.

Campaign development, base building and skill building

In addition to helping young people develop their worldview, some groups are using political education as a tool for campaign development and base building. Many organizations use political education workshops to reach youth in schools. These workshops can double as a campaign research strategy. Through interactive workshops, participants identify the most important community issues, which helps to shape organizational campaigns.

As part of the workshop, students do a survey about their experience with police and specifically truancy tickets. In L.A., if a bus comes late or breaks down, police are there to give students tickets for missing school. For poor and working class youth, how does getting a ticket help their situation? This year part of our research is focused on the experience of students and their ideas.

— Mark Anthony, Bus Riders Union

Some groups also invest in training their members to be trainers and facilitators with other youth, sometimes through campus-based clubs. By using popular education as a central strategy, organizers are building the overall capacity and skills of their organization, as well as a group of skilled leaders.

Strengthening traditional culture

As groups are building their membership base through political education, they are also using it as a tool to support traditional ways of life. For example, reservations often have communities spread out over a wide area. The distance and economic realities of the reservation make it hard to do organizing in the same way as in urban communities. Political education is a strategy that Native and rural groups use to create both a core of leaders and a broad network of activists.

One of the ways we have been able to keep people involved is through our trainings. With one of

our partner organizations, Owe Aku (Bring Back The Way), we have developed the Lakota Peoples School of Liberation. With this school we have been able to break down organizing and institutions of oppression and teach these things to our local communities. After this year we will develop our own unique curriculum and continue to develop Lakota trainers to carry this curriculum into more communities. Doing this will make our work more sustainable and long term. We will eventually have a trained network of young people that we can call on for training and to take action when we are faced with issues that affect our way of life.

— Nick Tilsen, Lakota Action Network

Political education has a long-lasting effect on young people. In the words of Ysaura Rodriguez, describing the youth in the ARMS program of Tri-County Community Health Center, “Once given the opportunity to learn, once it’s real to them, *se quedan inquietos, eh?*” They are restless, hungry to learn.

Land, Health and Community Self-Determination

In many communities, the connection between the health of the land and the health of the community is essential and deep. While some of the work that youth environmental justice groups are doing looks like environmental stewardship and conservation projects on the surface, its roots are deeply tied to cultural survival and self-determination.

Indigenous communities' struggles for self-determination and sovereignty often involve protection and restoration of sacred sites, as well as farming and gardening projects that include cultural preservation. Youth in the Indigenous Environmental Network's member groups work with mainstream environmentalists to protect petroglyph sites that have cultural and environmental importance. Other Native youth groups are planting gardens with traditional herbs and medicinal plants, providing an opportunity to learn from their elders, maintain their culture and deepen Native pride.

A few of the groups interviewed do not necessarily identify as environmental justice organizations, but their mission, goals or practice reflects some of the tensions and diversity of successful environmental justice strategies. For instance, Explorer's Club and Young Native Scholars, both in the San Diego, California area, work with Native communities to increase recruitment and retention of Native youth in the environmental sciences. This is important in terms of supporting future Native leaders in these fields, who will be able to combine the technical expertise of both Western science and traditional indigenous knowledge, to serve as resources for Native communities. These organizations have an understanding of environmental racism, although it may not be directly linked to a civil rights or Native sovereignty analysis.

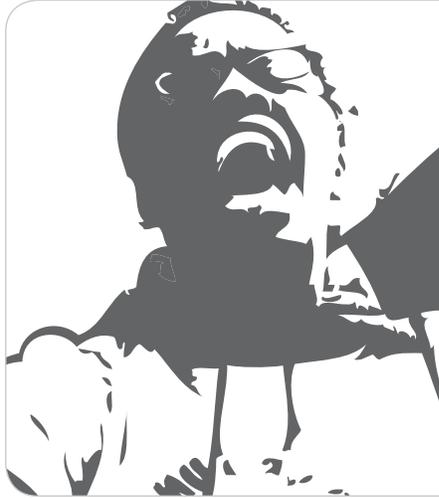
A big percentage of toxic sites are located on Indian reservations – environmental racism is real prevalent. It comes with the territory of being a reservation and a Native American. Tomorrow I am going out to one of the reservations. We're going to do an eco-classroom, a healing garden, with native medicinal plants, an organic farm, using well water, wind and solar energy, building a greenhouse out of sustainable design.

— Norrie Robbins, Explorer's Club

In urban communities, youth are often part of or spearheading grocery initiatives and organic garden/farm projects in economically depressed neighborhoods (e.g., People's Grocery in Oakland, California; Victory Gardens Project in New Jersey and Maine; and Growing Power in Milwaukee, Wisconsin) where there are no other sources of fresh, healthy food. Urban youth organizers are also involved in other neighborhood land reclamation projects, such as advocating for parks and recreation areas, and creating urban gardens and new green spaces. Several organizations are engaged in projects of recycling or community gardening that connect to their community development and service work.

These projects, intentionally or unintentionally, often serve the dual purpose of sensitizing youth to neighborhood conditions and allowing them to see the neighborhood from a new perspective. For example, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) conducted a Community Mapping Project in their neighborhood of Little Village, Chicago's largest Latino community. When we accompanied LVEJO organizers on a housing survey, one young woman said:

My view of the community changed. From walking around today, you see a lot of families, a lot of people out taking care of their houses. I used to live here, and we moved away a few years ago. The neighborhood has this reputation of being full of drugs, crime, gangs, poor people. But it doesn't seem like that from today.



“AIM and the traditional people instilled a sense of pride and identity into us even today. As a result many of our ceremonies have become stronger and stronger. Instead of shooting at each other like we were in the 70s, now we are praying with each other.”

— Nick Tilsen, Lakota Action Network

Finding 5. Innovative cultural work is a distinguishing feature of youth environmental justice organizing

Across organizations and regions, youth organizing and leadership development groups are using culture and community building as a central strategy for environmental justice. Organizers are using the power of arts and culture to engage youth in the movement, to reach the hearts of community members, to inspire dialogue around divisive topics, and to build community. This cultural work falls into five categories: media arts, performing arts and music, spiritual work, storytelling, and community building projects.

Media arts

Youth organizers are using video, radio, web production, photography and youth-produced newsletters to insert their voices and play leadership roles in these discussions. At UPROSE and at Appalshop, youth are trained to create their own videos about their communities. In Appalshop’s year-long media institute, youth work with professional producers to make films that serve and challenge the community around issues of strip mining, water quality, mountaintop removal and energy corporations’ ownership of the land and local economy.

These young people come from families that are coal miners. They depend on the company but may not have water they can drink because of pollution from the company. We use the Appalachia Media Institute to produce pieces that explore that tension and then those pieces are floated out to the community. I'm really sold on how powerful dialogue can be in communities – especially when it isn't occurring – and I think art is an incredible tool to get to that.

— Nick Szuberla, Appalshop

Performing arts and music

Youth organizers use music, chants, poetry and street theater to get their message to community members of all generations. An adult ally from the Bus Riders Union spoke of how their drum and chant corps plays a central role in their intergenerational organizing campaigns:

Culture is an important method in [transformational organizing] because it can imbue politics in a way that speaks to people. Hearing something through a song, chant, art or theater can trigger things that make people think in a broader way. For example, the chant "Let My People Breathe Clean Air" draws on an old gospel/civil rights song and connects this movement to the civil rights movement.

— Tammy Bang Luu, Bus Riders Union

Spiritual work and ceremony

For many organizers, integrating spirit is a way of grounding their work in community values and tradition. In many indigenous and Chicano environmental justice groups, spiritual work helps young people and community members heal from the effects of colonialism and rebuild traditional culture. Nick Tilsen at Lakota Action Network spoke about how living traditionally and living the ceremonies has been fundamentally connected with past and current Native organizing:

The American Indian Movement [AIM] has built a platform for us to stand on. Because AIM made the stances that they did in the 1970s ... we are able to continue the work we do today. AIM stood up with the traditional people to make it OK for us to be Native, for us to speak our language and practice our ceremonies. AIM and the traditional people instilled a sense of pride and identity into us even today. As a result many of our ceremonies have become stronger and stronger. Instead of shooting at each other like we were in the 70s, now we are praying with each other.

Storytelling

Many youth organizers spoke about storytelling as a tool for communities to reclaim and reinterpret their histories and experiences. Common Roots is a collaborative project in San Francisco, California, between PODER and the Chinese Progressive Association. Through this program, youth from two immigrant communities learn about Chinese and Aztec culture through exchanges such as sharing their families' immigration stories. By gathering these oral herstories/histories, young people connect with elders in their own families. In addition, Teresa Almaguer of PODER stated:

This has helped youth that traditionally don't even talk to each other see the similarities that exist in our communities – [for example] the reasons we migrate, and the racism and injustices we face as immigrants in this country.

From these new connections, youth organizers are able to build a stronger foundation for their organizing work.

Community building

Many environmental justice youth organizations are engaged in community building both formally and informally. Groups are building community by organizing spaces and events for the people to gather. For example, Pacoima Beautiful is creating a youth center where young people can display their art, music and photography. People Organized in the Defense of Earth and her Resources organizes an annual festival to protect a local park; this event draws hundreds of people from around Austin, Texas. They use poetry, Aztec dancing and ceremony to create a sense of community and connection with the earth. In Richmond, California, the Laotian Organizing Project uses crafts and cooking to help young Laotian organizers and elders build intergenerational community alongside their campaigns.



“REEP provides opportunities for young people at a key moment in their lives. We see that they get to cut their teeth and practice their skills in an actual campaign... For us it’s absolutely critical that they implement something of their own design”

— Jodi Sugarman-Brozan,
Roxbury Environmental
Empowerment Project

Finding 6. Youth environmental justice organizations blend organizing with long-term youth development and support

Young people involved in environmental justice organizing have often had their own lives negatively impacted by systems that neglect or deny many of their fundamental needs. It can be a huge challenge for them to work for community change while they are struggling to find jobs, succeed in school, resolve social and familial stresses, and survive racism and economic oppression⁴. As described in other sections of this report, many groups support their youth membership by offering mentorship and counseling; developing their personal, academic, artistic and cultural skills; and building community. By providing holistic support, groups are not only helping youth engage in current community issues, they are helping them survive (and hopefully thrive) during their youth and far into their futures. Groups identified youth-led campaign development as the main anchor for this work. The main challenges were the need for greater resources, community infrastructure and information sharing between groups.

⁴ Movement Strategy Center (2005) *Bringing It Together: Uniting Youth Organizing, Development and Services for Long-term Sustainability*. Oakland, CA: Movement Strategy Center.

Environmental injustice creates a need for holistic youth support

In a very real way, environmental injustice affects the entire well-being of young people and their families.

Some of the challenges are that we live in a [very difficult] time...[Young people are] having to deal with drugs in the neighborhood, violence, parents losing their jobs, your family being immigrants and having to put up with abuse at the workplace, prostitution. Issues that come up in people's everyday lives make it hard to focus on trying to do something positive.

— Teresa Almaguer, PODER (People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights), California

Many organizers talked about how the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual environment of their young people is as important as the physical environment, and how social toxins often impede youth development. Because young working-class people of color are often not receiving the education and support they need from other institutions in their communities, social change organizations fill in. In order to meet their organizing goals, they have to provide youth with development opportunities that they would not receive anywhere else.

Dealing with youth, there are so many things going on. You feel like you are a counselor, a crisis manager... So [we are left wondering] what are the best practices to support that, to make things sustainable.

— Yuki Kidokoro, Communities for a Better Environment

Many organizers, especially those who work with youth in the communities where they grew up, actively seek to create more opportunities for the youth they work with than had been available for them. Young adult organizers often serve as mentors, tutors, counselors and service referrals in addition to campaign leaders. They often go beyond their written job descriptions and build personal relationships with young people over time. This commitment to providing holistic support reflects both the methods and principles of environmental justice organizing, and a long-term investment in the well-being of their communities.

Youth-led campaign development

Of all the types of support they provide, organizations identified youth-led campaign development as their primary strategy of youth development. Youth-led campaign development means that young people conduct the process of choosing, developing and carrying out campaigns and projects in their communities. Through this process, groups build their capacity and membership, and young people are empowered as agents of change.

A Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project (REEP) organizer spoke about how youth-led campaign development is a critical process for helping young people to first shift their self-concept, then grasp their ability to act for change, and finally to mobilize and organize other youth. He said young people in their community are “mostly seen in handcuffs,” and for many youth it is the first time that anyone has asked them what they want to change in their community. This helps them understand that the issues they face are not their fault, and that there are real possibilities for change.

REEP provides opportunities for young people at a key moment in their lives. We see that they get to cut their teeth and practice their skills by practicing on a campaign. For them to gain leadership skills, they need to start from the beginning – to identify issues, do research, develop an organizing plan, participate in trainings and build leadership in other youth. [This is] best done when they choose an

issue that they're most jazzed up about. For us it's absolutely crucial that they implement something of their own design.

— Jodi Sugarman-Brozan, Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project

By supporting youth organizers to identify and organize projects and campaigns, organizations take the risk that their work might take longer and look different than when they organize adults. But organizers say the benefits are worth the risk. Young people not only develop stronger skills, analysis and confidence through hands-on work, they also expand the work of their organization by identifying new campaigns, planning and implementing new projects, and building new membership. And finally, through youth-led campaign development, organizations develop goals and achieve outcomes that they could not attain through any other process.

Youth leadership development requires additional infrastructure, resources and information sharing

Groups identified lack of resources and capacity as key challenges to providing long-term, comprehensive youth support. For example, several organizers said they wished more funding was available in order to hire the staff they need to do effective youth organizing. Without this funding, staff often struggle to balance organizing with providing support.

The biggest challenge is the balance between youth leadership development and personal development. We're always trying to work with the youth to be organizers and leaders, but that means a lot of personal and school support... Because of the population we work with it means working with parole officers and all that. We recently hired a third person with a history of casework and organizing [in order to help us meet these needs].

— Jodi Sugarman-Brozan, Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project

REEP and other groups are working to provide many different types of support within one organization. Some groups are also helping to build general community infrastructure to support young people (such as youth spaces and programs). Organizers also identified a need for more information sharing between groups to share models, curriculum and strategies for youth leadership development.

Youth-led Campaign Development Transforming Land Use

Youth environmental justice organizers in Pacoima, California are having a significant impact on city planning, by identifying how misused land can be used to meet community needs. Pacoima is a small community within the City of Los Angeles; it measures three square miles and is a mix of industrial and residential property. Lucia Torres, Youth Coordinator at Pacoima Beautiful, describes the relationship between housing, land use planning and environmental justice:

The industries started coming in around WWII, and the housing started popping up around the industry for the workers. Because Pacoima has low-income minority communities, no one really thought to say, "Hey, maybe we should do something about this zoning." For example, the Price Pfizer site is only a few hundred feet away from the housing – the families have no healthy homes – it's all an environmental issue. Developers want to create commercial and industrial space and not housing for these families, so you get five families living in a house – that's where it ties into environmental justice.

In these surroundings, there was only one green space where families spent time: a neglected recreation area around a reservoir. Youth organizers researched and developed a plan to restore the area as a park, and successfully pitched their plan to the City. The project eventually brought \$3.2 million into Pacoima and the park. Through youth-led campaigns such as this, young people are realizing their power to improve their own communities. As one organizer with Pacoima Beautiful said:

In the beginning, a youth member might ask something like, "Why isn't there a youth center in Pacoima?" and then at the end of the process, say, "We should call the city council and ask if we can turn this abandoned supermarket into a youth center." So they become aware of where they live and how much better they can make it.



“I think as a movement, we’re still trying to figure out how to set up a support system for the transition, what roles do young adults play, especially when there are fewer positions and resources available and there aren’t obvious alternatives.”

— Irene Shen, UPROSE (United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park)



Finding 7. Environmental justice organizations and networks are struggling to support generational transitions

Many of the current leaders of environmental justice organizations developed their skills through informal training as youth organizers. Despite this, *formal* youth leadership development programs are still fairly new in the environmental justice movement. As the first few generations of highly skilled young leaders emerge, organizations must figure out how to involve them as they age out of the “youth” category, however defined. Organizers identified several key needs:

- Program structures and curriculum to help young people plan their future
- Support for young people who are making the transition into new schools or employment
- Resources to support entry-level positions in grassroots organizations
- Stronger network-based programs to train young people for positions in the movement as well as positions in other fields

The youth and young adult organizers in the environmental justice movement are doing the hard work of learning how to support both individual and generational transitions. This is grounded in a deep

concern for the sustainability of both the environmental justice movement and social justice movements in general. Their vision includes support for not just youth, but elders and adults to make healthy transitions within the movement; this holistic approach will ultimately help to create a strong, intergenerational movement.

Transitioning out of the “youth” role is challenging

While most groups recognize the need to support young people as they transition to adulthood, few actually have program plans and structures in place and most rely instead on informal processes. Adult allies are needed to help plan these transitions more intentionally so that young activists are not lost to the movement. Many of the young adult organizers we interviewed (who were themselves mostly under 30) described the challenges of transitioning out of the “youth” category.

When you leave your teens and get into your 20s, you’re transitioning from an identity that’s targeted with oppression [adulthood] and moving into the role of an oppressor. It’s a confusing identity shift and there aren’t many resources to help you along. You’re set up to be more isolated, often leaving a structured community (e.g., school, home) and expected to make your way without the same access to peer or adult support. As you’re set up to compete with your peers for jobs and other resources, it gets reinforced that building relationships and having fun is no longer really expected or respected, but making lots of money and finding a career is. There are variations depending on class background, cultural expectations, etc., but in general, this oppression sets people up in a hard way. I think as a movement, we’re still trying to figure out how to set up a support system for the transition, what roles do young adults play, especially when there are fewer positions and resources available and there aren’t obvious alternatives.

— Irene Shen, UPROSE (United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park)

Many other young adult organizers spoke about how challenging it can be to support new youth organizers at the same time they are struggling to find outlets for their own leadership in the movement. Several organizers linked this struggle to the fact that elders also do not have many options for transitioning in the movement. Without new options for elders, it becomes extremely difficult to create the space for new leadership in existing organizations.

Supporting youth access to education and employment

Organizations take different paths to support youth in their next steps. For some, providing this support means helping youth organizers stay involved as young adult members. For others, it means helping youth find work, ideally in organizing or related areas. Some groups focus on helping youth organizers continue their education.

Most youth organizers and program coordinators find that they serve as mentors and role models for youth in the community. Organizational staff often support youth who want to apply for college, by serving as references and offering advice about financial aid and the application process. This is important in communities where these paths are not well understood or accepted, especially in new immigrant and refugee communities, such as the Cambodian community in Lowell, Massachusetts (River Ambassadors Program) and the Mexican American community in Pacoima, California (Pacoima Beautiful).

I had this student who doesn’t come around as much any more. He’s working really hard on his AP [Advanced Placement] classes. One time I was working, trying to get a grant out, and he was hanging around so I asked him what was up. He was telling me how his parents didn’t want him to go to college

because they can't afford it. I started talking to him about financial aid. He said, "My parents don't really believe in that, that we can qualify, that it really works." I told him about my experience. He started coming in and asking about this and that, how do I apply for this, how would I do that. Then he asked if I could talk to his mom. That was a situation where you have to start pushing. They are confiding in you and if you know how to do it then you have to help them.

— Lucia Torres, Pacoima Beautiful

Many groups see higher education as an important vehicle to help youth organizers from marginalized communities access power structures and bring resources and skills back to their communities. Some groups in the South, rural areas, and Native reservations have chosen to work with the few youth who have "made it" into college or university. These individuals may be the only ones who go on to college from the entire high school or reservation. Supporting those youth and linking them into networks has long-term effects for their efficacy as leaders, as well as for their individual development. A youth organizer of the Black Mesa Water Coalition in Tucson, Arizona said, "We depend a lot on college students because they're from different parts of the reservation and they take that message back to their communities."

Organizers were also careful to express that many of their youth did not go to college and that these youth need options, too. For instance, Jodi Sugarman-Brozan of Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project explained:

There's nothing out there unless you're going on to college, or if there are opportunities they're not accessible for young people. So, we're working on a menu of opportunities. It's very hard because we don't want to send them off to work at Blockbuster – we want to maintain their commitment to the work. We can't hire everyone – we realized we should have started this process at least six months before they graduated high school.

At Appalshop, based in Whitesburg, Kentucky, training youth to create media art around local issues develops young people's knowledge of and engagement in issues of coal mining, the timber industry and water rights, while teaching them skills that enable them to stay in the area and make a living. As one of their organizers stated, "There are more artists than farmers in rural America."

Other organizations integrate career counseling and awareness; youth organizers in their programs learn about different types of jobs in the environmental and social justice fields. Many organizers said it was important to train people who could move into decision making roles. Nia Robinson, formerly of Climate Justice Corps and Detroiters for Environmental Justice, talked about her own aspirations:

I want to go to school. I'd like to finish and I want to pursue a degree in policy. Even though I'm not in Detroit – I want to be able to do organizing through working on public policy and electoral politics. It's important for people from communities who have a vested interest in these issues to work on all levels including policy and law. I'd like to see us be able to have researchers, statisticians that were from our communities.

Resources are the main challenge in supporting youth to make transitions, especially within their own organization. Paid internships and entry-level staff positions are often essential for engaging young organizers from economically disenfranchised communities. And a core of paid organizers is often necessary in order to support broader, informal leadership within community organizations. Because many groups do not have the

resources to pay young adult organizers, their involvement is not economically sustainable, and many people have to make the choice to leave environmental justice work.

Some volunteerism, the way it is in student movements, comes from privilege. I see it in white student movements where people are more often able to do things on a volunteer basis. We are a Native youth organization – people need to feed their communities. It's hard to develop a core group because every young person has a family by 30, 25, even 20. I know that LAN [Lakota Action Network] would be way more powerful if we had 4-5 people who could be paid to do this work. People exist who want to do the work, but they had to move on to other things to feed kids. There needs to be a core group who is funded to do the organizing and coordinate and mobilize others' involvement. Otherwise, now we just have ideas.

— Nick Tilsen, Lakota Action Network

Young adults who are able to transition to other paid organizing work also need mentorship from more experienced organizers. These transitions can be especially challenging if they involve shifts from youth-friendly environments to ones outside of a “safe space.” Bianca Encinias, from the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ), reflected on her experience in a City-County Commission:

When I was on this commission, we were developing a charter for the city, and I was the only one there under the age of 50. I have a B.A. – no masters, no PhD – I was almost in shock. The process was so different – no mentorship, no one was there to support me as a younger person – that's the reality of our government. It was a very different experience from SNEEJ, where there's youth on the coordinating council and in any campaign core group. There's this base where we are supported and learning and where everyone's learning from each other. It made me realize how important [mentorship] is in the development of a young person's skills.

Networks and training institutes support transitions

Several youth organizers and program coordinators spoke about how networks and training institutes are beginning to play an important role in preparing individual young leaders to transition into different roles and organizations within the environmental justice movement. Networks and training programs have more capacity to introduce youth organizers to the bigger picture of the environmental justice movement.

For example, the BLOC (Building Leadership Organizing Communities) Network's Transitions Project helps youth organizers and movement activists from around the country connect and envision their future. Networks like the Indigenous Environmental Network and the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, fellowships like Climate Justice Corps, and training institutes like the Center for Third World Organizing's Movement Activist Apprenticeship Program, introduce young organizers to other organizations and movement roles. These programs place young people in paid internships in different areas of the country. On a local level, the FIRE fellowship program of Youth United for Community Action (YUCA) places youth of color in paid six-month internships at grassroots groups around the California Bay Area. Through this exchange, YUCA organizers have found that they are able to “...mediate future and current conflicts, by establishing real trust, understanding and a common vision.” By participating in these programs, youth are more likely to become campaign leaders or take other positions in adult-led movement work, but they may still require skill building and other supports. Even with mixed feelings, most youth who had this experience said this type of support is important because it enables young people to think big about their own futures.



“On a national scale, it’s pretty empowering because not only do they see what’s happening locally within their communities, but also they can relate to other issues in other communities. It’s also a support network for each other as youth organizers; we don’t have to recreate the wheel.”

— Erika Gonzalez, PODER (TX)



Finding 8. Youth environmental justice organizations maintain a connection to movement building through networks and training institutes

As mentioned in the last section, community-based youth environmental justice groups are participating in movement building not only through their own program activities, but through wider environmental justice networks. Youth organizers are participating in gatherings, institutes, networks and conferences, especially when there are opportunities for peer-led trainings and workshops. Young people are also building personal networks through arts and culture organizing. Networks and peer exchanges help young people break a sense of isolation, share resources, expand their worldview and develop connections to broader movements.

Specifically with respect to the environmental justice movement, organizations felt connected through personal networks, attendance at one or both of the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summits, regional networks and intermediary organizations. Youth environmental justice organizations are also involved in other networks, including youth organizing (juvenile justice, educational reform) networks, local and regional networks (usually issue-specific), and ethnically-based networks (this was

especially common for Latino organizations). Indigenous and Native groups clearly share an international frame of indigenous rights and are participating in international gatherings, such as the World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, and other U.N. gatherings. Many environmental justice organizations participate in the World Social Forum through efforts like Global Grassroots Justice and other networks.

Very few organizations are connected to mainstream environmental networks (focused on preservation, endangered species and recycling). There is an emerging relationship to environmental health, which is seen as an opportunity to open the field to more funding and spheres of influence. However, this new connection also poses the risk of minimizing the importance of the community building and community organizing components of the environmental justice movement.

Several groups mentioned the limits to this form of movement building. For example, undocumented organizers cannot just get on a plane, and grassroots organizations may not have the resources to travel to national conferences. Networks try to accommodate the needs of their members in different ways, such as rotating meeting locations.

Some of the organizations interviewed convene regional and national institutes to bring people together for training, skills development and networking. Training institutes build youth involvement in the environmental justice movement by supporting youth organizers to build their own personal connections and networks, and identify the commonalities in their work. Training institutes also ground national movement building work by building the practical skills of community-based groups.

On a national scale, it's pretty empowering because not only do they see what's happening locally within their communities, but also they can relate to other issues in other communities. It's also a support network for each other as youth organizers; we don't have to recreate the wheel. We can share resources and research that way.

— Erika Gonzalez, PODER (People Organized in the Defense of Earth and her Resources), Texas

Many of the organizations we interviewed also attend institutes organized by intermediaries like the Center for Third World Organizing in California and the Highlander Center in Tennessee. Some Native groups also use training institutes as a way to build movements within their own communities that are often spread out over a large rural area. In their case, training institutes help young people build a common understanding of the issues, share skills and create a network that can respond to issues rapidly through specific campaigns.

Additionally, these networks become resources for cross-sectoral organizing in the future. For instance, youth organizers that met through poetry slams in Austin, Texas are now working in environmental justice organizations, as well as doing school reform and youth anti-prisons work in their communities.



“The spiritual nature of movement building comes from a loving place. The problem is that we get caught up in the grind of it – the work that we do is very selfless, a lot of times it’s hard, hurtful, painful, but people keep doing it. I think we need to go back to why we need to do the work, and the spirituality of it.”

— Yalonda Sinde, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice



Finding 9. Youth organizing in environmental justice is evolving within a larger focus on movement sustainability

When groups invest in youth leadership development it is often part of an intentional shift toward healing and more holistic, transformational organizing. This shift comes out of a critique of past generations’ models of organizing, as well as an analysis of how to build movement sustainability. As described in other findings, youth organizing has opened creative space in the movement for many forms of sustainable organizing, including youth leadership development, intergenerational organizing, facilitative leadership, anti-oppression work, movement building and community building. By supporting youth to grow as organizers and as people, youth environmental justice work provides the paths necessary for leadership expansion, now and in the future. For this reason, youth organizing is important to everyone, not just young people.

Evaluation and reflection

How do people create a social movement that reflects their principles and the change they want to see? The organizers interviewed for this report spoke about evaluation and reflection as practices that can help the movement maintain its integrity and facilitate positive growth.

It takes a lot of what a lot of people don't like doing, which is evaluation and reflection on things we need to improve and change. It takes a lot of thoughtfulness. We critique external institutions for how they are oppressive and how they should change; we also need to practice that kind of reflection within our own organizations. I guess it's that cliché statement about walking the talk – that has a long-term impact on young people.

— Oscar Flores, Youth United for Community Action

Evaluation and reflection are ongoing practices that can have a long-term positive impact on intergenerational relationships and the movement as a whole. However, this type of self-reflection requires courage. Connecting to a spiritual practice is one of the ways organizers are drawing strength to reflect on how and why they do the work.

The spiritual nature of movement building comes from a loving place. The problem is that we get caught up in the grind of it – the work that we do is very selfless, a lot of times it's hard, hurtful, painful, but people keep doing it. I think we need to go back to why we need to do the work, and the spirituality of it.

— Yalonda Sinde, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice

In different ways, young organizers are calling for, and sometimes leading, this process of reflection and evaluation within the movement. This includes building reflective processes into their own projects, as well as pushing the broader movement to be accountable for its practices.

Conflict resolution and community healing

Many people expressed optimism at the ability of young people to create healing in the movement at large, if given the space and opportunity. In fact, young people often possess a hopefulness and flexibility that allows them to be leaders in any community healing process. For example, organizers from Southern Echo spoke about how their community is still haunted by the legacy of slavery:

There's still a lot of fear, of internalized terror. It's an obstacle to the work we do. They fear the capacity of the white community to generate injury – to individuals, to the Black community. There is a survival mentality. The importance of working with youth is that there is less fear.

— Mike Sayer, Southern Echo

Young people are using their unique position to help their communities and the larger movement transition through difficult conflicts and blocks. Sometimes, as described in earlier sections, youth are the risk takers – helping the community take more radical positions on issues. Sometimes youth are idealists—helping the movement aim for a high level of accountability and consistency. Sometimes they are artists—imagining and implementing new ways of doing things. Sometimes they are learners – helping to surface the history behind community issues. And, sometimes youth are bridge builders – helping to strengthen relationships between different parts of the movement. However, one thing is clear - it is the interaction between generations that makes healing possible.

For example, the interactions at Summit II laid bare the challenges that environmental justice faces as it grows into an intergenerational, multiracial movement, but they also highlighted opportunities and tremendous potential. The issues raised at Summit II were not just “youth issues,” but broader issues

related to movement culture, direction and leadership. As environmental justice becomes more successful, it has also become more complicated, making the need for reflection, communication and healing that much stronger.

In any kind of movement, the more fractured it is, the harder it is to fight against the real enemy. There are varying political agendas and personal interests that get in the way of building a united front. People need a way to deal with their personal struggles and to heal from the internalized effects of historical and societal oppression. I think the new generation, with some support, really needs a better example of conflict resolution. We need to be able to forgive each other and love each other for being humans.

— Irene Shen, UPROSE (United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park)

The young organizers interviewed for this report envision a movement that is courageous enough to look at the hard issues, and strong enough to work through differences with love and forgiveness. Many people expressed that in order to realize this vision, we need to create more room for everyone in the movement – from youth to elders – to transition and grow as leaders. By recognizing the needs of all people in the movement, youth leadership and intergenerational organizing can open the door for healing, growth and movement sustainability.

Findings About Funding



“Youth organizing funders might not fund youth environmental justice work because youth organizing tends to put youth at the center, where a lot of environmental justice work is more adult led or intergenerational. There’s a challenge in definitions.”

One of the key findings of our research was that young organizers are integrating their concerns about the environment and their communities by working in a holistic way. Through investing in youth organizing in environmental justice, funders have an opportunity not only to strengthen one small area of work, but to invest in the future of the larger environmental and social justice movements.

To provide a clear analysis on current funding for this field, we interviewed 10 diverse funders whose program areas intersect with these issues: the environment, environmental justice, youth organizing, and leadership development. We also asked people in our featured organizations some specific questions about funding. We found that both funders and practitioners were grappling with two similar sets of issues: the unique environmental justice lens and its intersection with other areas of work, and the challenge of focusing on youth without creating unintended divisions between generations.

Finding 1. Youth organizing in environmental justice intersects funding categories

The structure of the funding world means that youth organizing and leadership development in environmental justice can end up falling

through the cracks. Funders focused on “youth organizing” may overlook youth work taking place in multigenerational environmental justice organizations. Similarly, funders focused on “environmental justice” may not have exposure to environmental justice work taking place in multi-issue youth-led organizations. As one organizer described:

When I call a foundation, a dry call, and they don't know us very well, and I say I'm with [a youth organization] – they tell me to speak to the youth program officer, who often funds arts and leadership development. We fit with the community-building work or the environmental justice work, but we don't fit because we're youth – I think that's very important to the work. Even folks in the youth organizing movement define youth organizing as educational reform or juvenile justice. I'm not trying to knock that work, but it's not cool to be on the outskirts of the boxes.

In the funder interviews, individuals also described the need to expand the definitions and categories that funders are seeking to support, in order to support youth environmental justice work. For example, a youth organizing funder might approach youth environmental justice work from a very different orientation. One funder observed:

Youth organizing funders might not fund youth environmental justice work because youth organizing tends to put youth at the center, where a lot of environmental justice work is more adult led or intergenerational. There's a challenge in definitions.

In fact, as one youth organizing funder described, a wide distance may exist between a youth organizing funder's perspective and an environmental justice funder's perspective. Investing in youth-led work is an opportunity for environmental justice funders to gain more understanding of the effectiveness of youth organizing.

With environmental justice funders there is receptivity and open-mindedness, but not a lot of understanding or faith that youth organizing would really work. They can't understand how youth could have real power. They see youth organizing funding as “silo-ing” youth work.

Conversely, environmental justice funders expressed the need for youth work to complement the broader goals of the environmental justice movement. In the words of one environmental justice funder:

The core environmental justice funders have always focused on youth. We need to be careful that youth do not become the “flavor of the year.” We don't want to end up with a strong youth program in a weak organization. We need to pay attention to the core program. If a lot of funds go just for youth organizing, where does parallel development of the organization get funding? It's important to focus on general support.

Another environmental justice funder expressed hope that grantmaking focused on youth organizing in environmental justice will not detract from the few resources currently available for general organizing. According to this funder:

There are too few dollars in organizing and base building in general. Leadership development is part of that and youth leadership development is an important component of that. The most important

thing is to get more dollars going to community organizing and base building. Groups are underfunded, struggling to stay afloat. A specific youth focus or program takes resources.

Ultimately, however, most funders interviewed believed that a healthy intersection between environmental justice and youth organizing funding would emerge to support the intersections and synergy taking place at the grassroots level. In one funder's view:

Two "camps" of funders do exist on this. What will change this is that the work on the ground [youth led and adult led] is getting closer together so funders will have to follow and respond to that. There are "passing the baton" conversations coming up from grassroots organizations, especially those who have been intentionally intergenerational for a long time, like Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, Indigenous Environmental Network, and Southern Echo.

Moreover, both youth organizing and environmental justice funders could benefit from a more vibrant intersection. As one youth organizing funder asserted, the field of youth organizing is grappling with questions about leadership expansion that could in fact be informed by the environmental justice experience:

Environmental justice groups have a more intentional understanding of the need for leadership transition than groups in other areas, maybe because it really started out with a "movement" frame.

Several funders stressed that the leadership development expertise that has emerged from youth organizing could help shape thinking in many other fields.

We are focused on broadening the constituency of environmentalism. We look at the role of youth as a constituency for environmentalism. There is a lot more youth leadership in environmental justice than in the environmental movement. The environmental movement has a lot to learn from environmental justice.

As these comments from organizers and funders suggest, a strategic focus on youth in environmental justice demands a multidimensional lens, as well as an understanding of the potentially vibrant intersection that is possible between different fields of work and funding.



We need to have old and new talk together about transitions in organizing and movement building.

Finding 2. Supporting leadership expansion strengthens youth environmental justice work

Many of the practitioners we interviewed were hopeful about the role of funders in strengthening young people's leadership in environmental justice movement building. They also had clear suggestions about how this support can be improved. There is a clear opportunity for funders to support healing, dialogue and greater movement sustainability by supporting expanded leadership. One funder said:

I think most environmental justice funders are trying to figure out the transition to the next generation [of organizing leadership]. We need to be engaging groups in questions while respecting current leadership.

Another environmental justice funder expressed appreciation for the convening opportunities that funders can create, but also encouraged them not to inadvertently reinforce generational divisions:

We don't want to create a situation where older leaders are banging up against newer leaders because the new folks are being pulled aside by funders. There is a space and a place for the older generation to play a strategic role in campaigns. Gathering young leaders together is useful. They hardly ever get

to see each other and interact, to talk about the movement not in a particular box. But just gathering new leaders together is not enough. We need to have old and new talk together about transitions in organizing and movement building.

Others emphasized that a focus on youth in environmental justice would need to hold the complexities of leadership expansion. For example, one environmental funder expressed hope that the needs of current young adult leaders would not be set aside:

Right now there are adult-led environmental justice organizations with young people in their 30s at the helm. Can they be sustained? I've seen a lot of mid-30s people leaving environmental justice organizations with no transition plan for themselves or the organization. Seems like something is not being nurtured.

Another voiced a similar hope that discussions of youth leadership would broaden out to larger questions of "new" leadership:

"New" leadership of all ages needs to be supported. People who are not "young" but are new to the movement need support. There are emerging community leaders in their 30s and 40s who have been working in community health and HIV, who have never been involved in the environmental justice movement. They have a lot of history but are also "new" and tend to engage very well with both youth and older people. They are bridge builders that we should be invested in.

As funders move forward to support youth in environmental justice, it will remain critical to examine new ways of applying an environmental justice lens and focusing on leadership expansion.

“Do’s and Don’ts” for a national strategy

In our interviews, we asked both funders and practitioners about how to develop a national funding strategy to support youth in environmental justice. The table below summarizes the suggestions that emerged from those interviews.

DO

- Bring in funders who have not yet supported environmental justice
- Look at existing models like the Funders Collaborative for Youth Organizing
- Allocate the bulk of funding resources to grassroots groups directly for their organizing work, capacity building and convenings/ network development
- Allow grassroots organizations to help direct additional resources to intermediaries
- Recognize the distinct aspects of youth leadership development and overall leadership expansion
- Recognize the interconnectedness of youth leadership development and overall leadership expansion
- Engage local funders to establish local funding opportunities
- Fund collective efforts such as gatherings, trainings, networks, etc.
- Consider creative ways to support individuals in transition
- Establish realistic expectations of community-based organizations that do not over- or underestimate their capacity
- Document learnings
- Ensure ongoing ways for organizations in the field to provide suggestions and feedback on the process, structure, and work of the fund or foundation
- Let community-based organizations define their own work and the movement

DON'T

- Narrow the focus of existing environmental justice funding
- Look at youth in isolation from the larger context of leadership development, movement building and leadership expansion
- Take a cookie-cutter approach to defining youth leadership development
- Focus solely or primarily on establishing a leadership training program
- Create structures that exclude organizers from decision making and administration

Recommendations

For Funders

Funding youth organizing in environmental justice provides an opportunity to connect the powerful leadership of young people to the broader goals of environmental and social change. The intergenerational models being developed offer a bold vision and strategy to unify and strengthen the environmental movement as a whole. The following recommendations provide insight on how to best support these efforts.

1) Support new, intersectional funding strategies

Both funders and organizations described the difficulty of fitting youth environmental justice into rigid funding categories. Youth environmental justice work has direct implications for work related to youth and the environment, and as this report illustrates, it also intersects with a broad range of organizing areas (such as educational, racial, economic and gender justice) across the larger social change movement. There is a critical need for funders to support intersectional work, although the methods of support may not yet be obvious, smooth or easy. Possibilities include developing funding strategies that cut across different funding portfolios and creating opportunities for convening and dialogue across sectors.

2) Distinguish youth without dividing the movement

In all our interviews a loud and clear message emerged about the need for funders to support the specific needs and opportunities of young people. However, interviewees also expressed the hope that these funding processes would not isolate youth leadership development and transition from other leadership expansion and movement sustainability issues. Similarly, funders can acknowledge youth as current leaders in making change, while recognizing the field of youth organizing as a vital source of future leadership for a broad range of sectors.

3) Embrace the natural and necessary transition of organizations and individuals

This report underscores the fluidity of individuals and organizations in movement building. Funders seeking to support youth environmental justice can actively support the transition processes of individuals and organizations. For example, funders could provide network and training opportunities to young people and emerging leaders in transition to greater leadership roles within their organization or the movement. Funders could also provide expanded general support grants to organizations in the process of leadership transition and expansion, or support for organizations to access organizational development consultants or specialized training. Funders could also support documentation of lessons learned from recent and historical experiences with individual and organizational transition.

4) Commit to learning from and listening to diverse voices in the field

As this report demonstrates, the breadth and depth of youth leadership in environmental justice is enormous, complex and always evolving. Funders can honor the knowledge of people creating change in their own communities by committing to an ongoing process of learning from and listening to a range of different organizations and individuals. Through this process, funders can help ensure that their strategies and support are most effective.

Conclusions

Based on this report's Findings from the Field and Findings about Funding, we offer the following conclusions:

1) Youth organizing in environmental justice is innovating new strategies for social change

Both environmental justice and youth organizing groups are developing the kind of multi-issue political vision that progressive movements currently seek. They are also grounded in solid experience, putting big ideas like sustainability and inclusion into practice. Moreover, each operates from a distinctive lens; together these ways of seeing illuminate new dimensions of problems and new opportunities for change.

2) Youth-led work and intergenerational work can and should coexist

Youth-led work and intergenerational work both serve an important purpose in community empowerment and movement sustainability. Youth leadership development serves to prepare younger generations to participate and play leadership roles in communities and movements. Intergenerational collaboration helps to ensure that generations are working with, and not against, each other. Youth organizing in the environmental justice movement models the strength of this combination in exciting and powerful ways.

3) Youth leadership development represents a shift toward sustainable movements and holistic organizations

The youth leadership development work we examined was evolving in response to questions about sustainability. For example, how do we ensure that "new" people are continuously coming into movement building? How do we ensure that new leaders find the support, opportunities and inspiration they need to make a lifelong commitment to movement work? This work is also evolving in response to questions about organization, such as: how do organizations engage people in ways that nurture their political, emotional, spiritual, and material needs? What is the relationship of the organization to its community and to movement building? How do organizations evolve and transition in response to different environments and phases of history? While the answers to these questions are works-in-progress, it is clear that youth environmental justice work provides a rich set of experiences that inform our understanding of social change processes.

4) The necessary paths within and across organizations do not yet exist to support transitions across the movement

The process of leadership expansion requires a deep understanding and serious time commitment, and it may take many different paths and forms. People of all ages require support for their growth and transitions within the movement. While organic and informal efforts are clearly taking place, there is a need for intentional and well-resourced structures that can better support individuals as they move into different roles in movement work. Emerging models such as the Transitions Project of BLOC Network⁵ (Building Leadership and Organizing Communities Network) should be examined for the lessons and tools they offer.

⁵See www.blocnetwork.org for more information.

5) Supporting youth environmental justice requires new funding approaches

As this report demonstrates, vibrant conversations are taking place about new opportunities for funding youth in environmental justice. Funders are finding new ways of understanding and supporting organizing that intersects issue areas. These emerging funding strategies have the potential to support leadership expansion and greater movement sustainability as a whole.

ReGenerations: A New Funding Initiative

One of the goals of this report was to attract new funders to the exciting work being done in the field of youth environmental justice. To that end, we are pleased that this report has contributed to the creation of a new funding initiative that will strategically respond to youth leadership development needs within the environmental justice movement. In early 2006, the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing will begin looking for funding partners to join with the Ford Foundation in launching a new initiative called ReGenerations: Youth Leadership in Environmental Justice.

This multiyear funding initiative will support community-based environmental justice groups that have demonstrated a commitment to developing young people's leadership in the context of community building and organizing for environmental justice. Specifically, it will support environmental justice organizations' increased effectiveness in youth leadership development, provide opportunities for strategy and model sharing between organizations, and document effective models of multigenerational community organizing. Through funding, networking and documentation, the ReGenerations initiative will contribute to the sustainability of effective leadership in the environmental justice movement.

Funders interested in joining this initiative can find out more by contacting:

Alea Woodlee
Associate Director
Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing
330 Seventh Ave., 14th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212.213.2113 x45
alea@jfjustice.org

Appendices

GROUPS INTERVIEWED

Alaska Youth for Environmental Action

program of the National Wildlife Federation
750 West 2nd Ave., Suite 200, Anchorage, AK 99501
907.339.3907

Appalshop

91 Madison, Whitesburg, KY 41858
606.633.0108 | www.appalshop.org

Ayudame a Realizar Mis Sueños

program of Tri-County Community Health Center
3331 Easy St., PO Box 227, Newton Grove, NC 28366
910.567.6194 x5025

Black Mesa Water Coalition

8610 Arroyo Trail, Flagstaff, AZ 86004
928.213.9760 | www.blackmesawatercoalition.org

Bus Riders Union

project of The Labor Community Strategy Center
3780 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1200, Los Angeles, CA 90010
213.387.2800 | www.busridersunion.org

Communities for a Better Environment

1440 Broadway, Suite 701, Oakland, CA 94612
510.302.0430 | www.cbecal.org

Community Coalition for Environmental Justice

2820 East Cherry St., Seattle, WA 98122
206.720.0285 | www.ccej.org

Explorer's Club

11017 Via Merida, La Mesa, CA 91941
619.303.9095

Grayson Neighborhood Council

PO Box 941, Westley, CA 95387
209.895.3352
www.graysonneighborhoodcouncil.50megs.com

Indigenous Environmental Network

PO Box 485, Bemidji, MN 56619
218.751.4967 | www.ienearth.org

Lakota Action Network

PO Box 259, Porcupine, SD 57772
605.867.1675 | www.lakotaaction.net

Laotian Organizing Project

project of Asian Pacific Environmental Network
220 25th St., Richmond, CA 94804
510.236.4616 | www.apen4ej.org

Little Village Environmental Justice Organization

2856 South Millard Ave., Chicago, IL 60623
773.762.6991 | www.lvejo.org

Pacoima Beautiful

11243 Glenoaks Blvd., Suite 1, Pacoima, CA 91331
818.899.2454 | www.pacoimabeautiful.org

PODER (People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights)

474 Valencia St., #125, San Francisco, CA 94103
415.431.4210 | www.podersf.org

PODER (People Organized in the Defense of Earth and her Resources)

PO Box 6237, Austin, TX 78762-6237
512.472.9921 | www.poder-texas.org

River Ambassador Program

600 Suffolk St., Wannalancit Bldg., Lowell, MA 01854
 978.934.4677
 ecommunity.uml.edu/river_ambassador/

UPROSE (United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park)

166A 22nd St., Brooklyn, NY 11232
 718.492.9307 | www.uprose.org

Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project

program of Alternatives for Community & Environment
 2181 Washington St., #301, Roxbury, MA 02119
 617.442.3343 | www.ace-ej.org

Young Native Scholars

program of The BRIDGE: Indian Training Trust Fund
 8 Elm Ave., Imperial Beach, CA 91932
 619.423.6610 | www.nativescholars.org

Southern Echo

PO Box 9306, Jackson, MS 39286
 601.982.6400 | www.southernecho.org

Youth United For Community Action

1848 Bay Rd., East Palo Alto, CA 94303
 650.322.9165 | www.youthunited.net

Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice

PO Box 7399, Albuquerque, NM 87194
 505.242.0416 | www.sneej.org

INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

Name	Organizational Affiliation(s)
Lisa Charley	Movement Strategy Center (Oakland, CA); formerly with Young Women United (Albuquerque, NM)
Gopal Dayaneni	Ruckus Society (National), Our Power Action Camps; currently at Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (San Jose, CA)
Paulina Hernandez	Highlander Center (nearby New Market, TN)
Carla Perez	Communities for a Better Environment (Oakland, CA)
Nia Robinson	Formerly with Detroiters for Environmental Justice (Detroit, MI); Climate Justice Corps (San Francisco, CA)
Pam Tau Lee	University of California, Berkeley Occupational and Environmental Health Program (Berkeley, CA); Board Member, Asian Pacific Environmental Network (Oakland, CA); Planning Committee of the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Oakland, CA)

YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN

Degree of Youth Leadership	Organization Name
Youth-led organizations	Black Mesa Water Coalition
	Lakota Action Network
	Youth United for Community Action
Transitioning to youth leadership	PODER (TX)
Youth-led, adult supported	Appalshop
	River Ambassador Program
	Ayudame a Realizar Mis Sueños
Intergenerational	Bus Riders Union
	Little Village Environmental Justice Organization
	PODER (CA)

GROUPS INTERVIEWED

Structure and Relationship to Adults and Elders

Definition of Youth

Coalition of young activists, mostly former university students. Informal elder/traditional leader advisors.

Based on self-definition

Staff, board and membership all under 30. Elders and adults on the advisory council and future business advisory council.

Under 30

Some adults on board. Some adults in informal advisory or mentor capacity.

Multitiered: high school age, then "senior" youth mentor younger / newer members

Adult founders/directors. Majority of staff are young adults and youth. Currently building leadership to transition to be youth-led.

Under 30

Started by young people. About a quarter of staff under 30. 12 paid producers, usually one of these is under 21. Young interns and apprentices. Youth lead program and project decisions. Adults provide leadership in organizational infrastructure, administration and finance.

Under 30

20 youth organizers, supported by adult mentors. Youth act as a bridge to elders in the community, giving them information about the environment.

High school age

Has its own board of youth directors. Youth members develop workshops, program and advocacy plans. Adults are mentors and support the youth leaders. Larger organization is adult directed and staffed.

Mostly 14-18 but they do not age out

Full integration of youth and adults across the organization.

Ages 14-18

Intergenerational family-based model. Youth-led and adult-led projects. Youth integrated as participants. Adults direct the organization and support youth.

Ages 6-25, mostly high school age

Youth integrated into PODER as a whole, with youth participation in planning, decision making and organizing. Multigenerational model that supports youth as part of their families and communities. 30 youth organizers in structured year-long program, including youth-led campaign development and political education. Working to develop formal ways to continue to work with and support graduates of the youth organizing program.

No set definition. Program targets youth ages 15-20

Degree of Youth Leadership	Organization Name
Intergenerational Youth-driven programs within adult-led organizations	Southern Echo
	Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice
	Grayson Neighborhood Council
	Alaska Youth for Environmental Action
	Communities for a Better Environment
	Community Coalition for Environmental Justice
	Indigenous Environmental Network
	Pacoima Beautiful

Structure and Relationship to Adults and Elders

Definition of Youth

Young people fully integrated into the work as part of the community. Working with adults to overcome stereotypes of youth “that are deeply rooted in the culture” – through a model of “aggressive patience” so older people don’t “run over” younger people.

All ages, concentrating on high school age

Intergenerational family-based model with youth-led projects such as the Youth Leadership and Development Campaign. Youth integrated into all aspects of organization, such as the Coordinating Council, campaigns, planning committees and other projects.

Under 35

Intergenerational model. Youth recruited from high schools, but also integrated as part of community leadership development workshop series. Youth support adult-led efforts and also take on own projects.

Program focuses on high school age, although younger members present

Founded by teens, who run the chapters, decide which projects and issues to undertake. Youth make up more than half the statewide advisory board, which plans strategic direction of program and votes on statewide initiatives. Paid youth staff/ interns, trainers, program planners and evaluators.

Mostly high school age

Differs in Northern and Southern California. In Northern California, Youth EJ is an adult-facilitated program within CBE. Youth plan some program activities and are integrated into adult-initiated campaigns. Adults lead and direct the organization and campaigns. In South California, Youth EJ is a youth-led component of CBE. Young adults who were former members lead and mentor the program. The youth program created the model and infrastructure for CBE organizing and initiates many campaigns. Adults direct/lead the overall organization, provide support to youth organizers.

High school age

EJYA (Environmental Justice Youth Advocates) is the youth component of CCEJ. Adults are mentors, and direct the larger organization.

High school age

Youth-led program within IEN member groups. Youth are also integrated into other IEN campaigns. Adults direct and lead IEN. IEN supports member groups to define their own relationships between elders and youth in their communities.

No set definition. Generally under 35

Youth program component. Adult mentors support youth coordinators to plan their own curriculum and projects. Youth provide larger organization with research. Paid youth interns during summer institute.

Ages 14-18

Degree of Youth Leadership	Organization Name
Youth-driven programs within adult-led organizations	Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project UPROSE (United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park)
Adult-led programs for youth	Explorer's Club Young Native Scholars

Structure and Relationship to Adults and Elders	Definition of Youth
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REEP is the youth arm of ACE, an adult-directed organization. REEP has 4-6 paid youth staff. Two youth on the ACE Board of Directors.

High school age

Several youth groups within adult-directed organization. Two youth on Board of Directors. One young adult youth organizer.

High school age

Adult-directed and facilitated science/environmental program with indigenous youth participants.

Ages 6-12

YNS is an adult-directed and facilitated academic/career enrichment program that uses an environmental justice lens with youth participants. Residential two-week summer program with guest speakers from the field.

High school age

Program Areas and Strategies of

Political education

Power mapping

Peer exchanges & site visits to other groups

Training institutes, summits & conferences

Toxic tours

Community history

School workshops

Skills training

Leadership development & mentoring

Youth supports

Job readiness training

Career & academic tutoring, counseling

Community building

Paid internships

Popular education & action research

Youth-led campaigns/projects

Participating in adult-led campaigns

Direct action

Network development

Base building

Advocacy

Public testimony

Coalition building & solidarity work

Community mapping

Media & messaging

Training trainers

Community education

Letter writing

High school clubs

Youth Environmental Justice Groups

Community Development	Environment and Conservation	Cultural Work
Community economic development	Recycling	Media arts (video, radio, photography, web design, newsletters, etc.)
Micro-enterprise	Restoration	Music & performance
Community gardening	Sacred sites protection/restoration	Traditional culture, ritual, ceremony
Sustainability projects	Conservation lobbying/advocacy	Physical & spiritual well-being practices
Sustainable housing / construction	Urban gardening and forestry	Poetry, spoken word
Land use planning	Science Education	Crafts
Asset mapping	Placing youth on boards of conservation organizations	Cooking
Service projects		Intergenerational community building
Economic justice		Multiethnic/cross-cultural sharing
Equitable development/ community benefits agreements		
Fighting toxic sites		
Environmental health surveys		

The following four documents were created by participants at the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in October, 2002. They outline essential concepts of youth organizing and environmental justice.

An overview of YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

From the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit
Washington, DC, October 26, 2002

As drafted by the youth of the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit here stands a statement on youth leadership in the environmental justice movement. This document is the product of several days of discussion amongst a group of 150 youth and does not assume to represent the entire youth environmental justice movement, particularly the perspectives of Native and rural youth.

Issues that youth are facing

As youth we feel society has a negative perception of us. Society places stereotypes on us based on our race, class, gender, sexuality and age. Our voices and concerns are often not heard by decision makers that affect our society. We believe that we have unique and diverse perspectives that can enhance the environmental justice movement.

We want to learn from our elders, their experiences, stories and knowledge. We believe that through being mentored by our elders and by being involved in decision making processes, we can build a powerful movement ensuring environmental justice for all. The following are issues facing youth:

Urban and rural problems

- Lack of green space (parks, urban gardens)
- Gentrification – the process by which low-income communities of color are pushed out of where we live
- Lack of affordable housing
- Poor air quality
- Limited access to resources
- Maintaining unique cultural identity
- Lack of job opportunities (economic justice)
- Worker health and safety
- Healthy lifestyle (access to organic foods, facilities)
- Lack of awareness between racial/ethnic communities (cultural and political)
- Lack of awareness of environmental justice issues
- Homelessness
- Lack of transportation choices
- The siting of freeways near low-income communities and communities of color

Educational problems

- Lack of courses in ethnic studies
- High drop-out rates
- Lack of cultural understanding by teachers, cultural insensitivity, mono-culturalism
- Lack of parent and community involvement because of language barriers and the lack of understanding that the community has power
- Lack of culturally-appropriate mentors in educational systems (career/college counselors)
- Biased/racist curriculum, eurocentric curriculum
- Standardized testing that discriminates against low-income youth of color (e.g., STAR tests, exit exams, high stakes testing, SATs, ACTs)
- Students being criminalized more than protected by police in schools
- Lack of funds, unequal distribution of funds
- Overcrowded classrooms and poor school facilities (e.g., dirty bathrooms, no windows, etc.)
- Unhealthy food served in our schools

Common problems youth face

- Police brutality
- Language barriers (e.g., English-only laws)
- Ageism and negative stereotypes of youth (e.g., how we dress, talk and act)
- Racial profiling
- Teen pregnancy
- High drop-out rates
- Unhealthy spirituality
- Destruction of social fabric
- High suicide rates
- Drug, alcohol and tobacco use and distribution
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Negative body images of women and men
- Lack of jobs and programs for youth
- Peer pressures and pressures from adults
- Domestic miscommunication between parents, family, communities and their children (generation gap)
- Pursuit of individualistic and materialistic lifestyles, resulting in the loss of cultural identity, values and morals
- Ism's (e.g., heterosexism, transphobia, racism, xenophobia, classism, sexism, ageism, ableism)
- Lack of cultural and youth centers
- Sexual harassment at schools
- Lack of youth employment programs or formal job training

Environmental racism

- Siting of toxic incinerators and nuclear waste facilities in communities where low-income, indigenous and/or people of color live
- Poor air quality
- Polluted water
- Breaking trust and responsibilities
- Loss of traditional knowledge
- Designating indigenous lands as energy colonies for the rest of the nation

- Deliberately violating environmental policies
- Lack of economic and political leverage
- Lack of access to congressional bodies
- Racist federal Indian policies
- Desecration and destruction of sacred sites
- Loss of cultural diversity and sustainable ways of living for Native peoples
- Red lining, inability to get loans based on discrimination and poverty
- Lack of emergency warning systems and/or effective, multilingual warning systems

Root Causes of Youth Environmental Justice Issues

The two main causes of oppression are greed and ignorance. Greed makes people want more things for themselves so they take things from others. Ignorance is the result of the lack of education, communication between people and respect for life. Current economic and political systems encourage greed and ignorance. The environmental justice movement needs to push for alternative economic and political systems.

Greed/Money (love of being on top) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Power• Individualism• Racism• Ageism (discrimination based on age)• Classism (discrimination based on social class)• Apathy – people don't care• Imperialism• Colonialism• Political corruption	Ignorance <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of education• Propaganda targeting youth• Corporate media• Lack of communication between people• Parental pressures• Cultural genocide• Lack of respect for life• Taking things for granted
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Definition of A Leader

A leader

- Facilitates
- Acts as a role model
- Is accountable to the community
- Listens to the people
- Is open minded
- Takes initiative
- Contributes and participates
- Represents the voices of the people
- Serves the people
- Is culturally sensitive to the differences of people and doesn't push her/his ways onto others
- Is organized and wants to organize

- Takes responsibility for his/her actions
- Is honest
- “Practices what s/he preaches”

What does youth leadership development look like?

Definition of Leadership Development: The process through which youth become leaders, get leadership skills and gain knowledge about communities and issues.

Youth

- Outreach to the community
- Work with other groups
- Work with other adults and youth of color in grassroots organizations
- Educate constituents on oppression issues such as racism, xenophobia, sexism, ageism, classism, heterosexism and transphobia
- Act as facilitators
- Develop workshops and trainings
- Present workshops for other youth
- Lead and run organizations, clubs and programs
- Organize the community through research, organizing press conferences, actions, etc.
- Arrange meetings and forums to voice community concerns
- Have internship opportunities in grassroots organizations
- Identify their own issues and concerns
- Work on campaigns
- Learn from each other
- Network
- Share issues and the common roots of those issues with other youth
- Have meaningful involvement, empowerment and engagement in all aspects of an organization
- Are not tokenized/trophies
- Voice opinions in a respectful manner

Youth Leadership in the Environmental Justice Movement

Examples of things that need to happen for youth leadership to flourish in the environmental justice movement:

In Organizing

- Youth talk about their issues with other youth, as well as adults
- Youth find similar issues amongst each other
- Youth facilitate
- Youth recruit and organize others to join
- Youth plan meetings
- Youth work together
- Youth make sure other youth fulfill their responsibilities and hold one another accountable

At an EJ Movement Event

- Facilitators communicate from a youth perspective (e.g., interactive and not boring)
- Translation is provided for everyone
- Food is provided for everyone
- Lodging is provided for everyone
- There are workshops about environmental justice issues youth want to talk about
- The audience is youth
- Things are scheduled so people can gain as much as possible
- Everyone gets to speak
- Youth learn from and respect elders
- People are appreciative of what people have been through and what they've done
- Space is provided for youth meetings and workshops
- Supplies are provided for meetings and workshops
- Youth are doing the outreach
- Meetings of youth are convened to create goals and outlines for the action/event
- Youth are involved in decision-making
- Youth create the tasks for the action/event
- Youth network with each other
- People collaborate intergenerationally

The Environmental Justice Movement in 10 Years

- More youth are involved in the movement
- Increased youth and adult representation (e.g., as speakers, at events) from different ethnic communities
- Youth are more aware of environmental justice issues
- Popular education (education based on the experiences of people) is incorporated in organizations
- Youth are transitioning into leadership positions in organizations
- Development of youth programs focused on youth issues
- Youth are facilitating more workshops, panels and events
- Youth are working more closely with elders (mentoring)
- Stronger national connection between grassroots EJ groups (more communication, better organized)
- More funding opportunities for youth programs in the environmental justice movement
- Better understanding of interconnectedness, relatedness (with land and roots)
- Cultural understanding between ethnic groups
- International youth representation/involvement
- Executive youth council
- Retreat centers for youth

PRINCIPLES OF THE YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

From the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit,
Washington, DC, October 26, 2002

As drafted by the youth of the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, here stand nine principles of the youth environmental justice movement. This document is the product of several days of discussion amongst a group of 150 youth and youth forums held outside of the Summit. It does not assume to represent the entire youth environmental justice movement, particularly the perspectives of Native and rural youth.

- Environmental justice demands for the United States government to be held accountable for violations of human rights and land rights, both domestically and internationally.
- Environmental justice demands that young people work to incorporate the principles of environmental justice into government funded institutions that perpetuate the issues affecting youth of color, indigenous youth, and immigrant and undocumented youth.
- Environmental justice respects and promotes the full involvement of all people across the full spectrum of identities and abilities that make us who we are.
- Environmental justice demands that low-income youth, including immigrant youth, and indigenous youth, live in communities that are secure from crime, drugs, disease, pollution and labor exploitation.
- Environmental justice calls for us to build communities, conduct gatherings, and build our political structures in a way that reflects the histories, traditions and practices of the full spectrum of identities and abilities that make up the communities we come from and that do not reflect the structures that oppress us.
- Environmental justice calls for us to utilize movement resources, such as funds, staff and people's time and energy, in a way that is sustainable, renewable and puts these resources back into our oppressed communities so that they serve the movement as a whole.
- Environmental justice requires the experiences of youth and elders to be shared and respected in all areas of the movement and the need for an intergenerational approach that challenges divisive tendencies.
- Environmental justice demands that as youth we stand against unjust war in all its forms, including disproportionate military recruitment in our communities, the media's glamorization of military lifestyle and the tremendously destructive effects militarism has on the environment.
- Environmental justice demands that youth seek to challenge and change the environmentally destructive aspects of our lifestyles in order to stop the destruction of our planet.

People of Color Environmental Justice PRINCIPLES OF WORKING TOGETHER

From the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit
Washington, DC, October 26, 2002

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational, multiethnic People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives and to support traditional cultural economics which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and of the water, air and land and in the genocide of our peoples, to affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice.

PRINCIPLE ONE: PURPOSE

1. A The Principles of Working Together uphold the Principles of Environmental Justice to eradicate environmental racism in our communities.
1. B The Principles of Working Together require local and regional empowered partnerships, inclusive of all.
1. C The Principles of Working Together call for continued influence on public policy to protect and sustain Mother Earth and our communities and also honor past promises and make amends for past injustices.

PRINCIPLE TWO: CORE VALUES

2. A The Principles of Working Together commit us to working from the ground up, beginning with all grassroots workers, organizers and activists. We do not want to forget the struggle of the grassroots workers. This begins with all grassroots workers, organizers and activists.
2. B The Principles of Working Together recognize traditional knowledge and uphold the intellectual property rights of all peoples of color and Indigenous peoples.
2. C The Principles of Working Together reaffirm that as people of color we speak for ourselves. We have not chosen our struggle, we work together to overcome our common barriers, and resist our common foes.

- 2. D The Principles of Working Together bridge the gap among various levels of the movement through effective communication and strategic networking.
- 2. E The Principles of Working Together affirm the youth as full members in the environmental justice movement. As such, we commit resources to train and educate young people to sustain the groups and the movement into the future.

PRINCIPLE THREE: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- 3. A The Principles of Working Together recognize that we need each other and we are stronger with each other. This Principle requires participation at every level without barriers and that the power of the movement is shared at every level.
- 3. B The Principles of Working Together require members to cooperate with harmony, respect and trust — it must be genuine and sustained relationship building. This demands cultural and language sensitivity.
- 3. C The Principles of Working Together demand grassroots workers, organizers and activists set their own priorities when working with other professionals and institutions.
- 3. D The Principles of Working Together recognize that community organizations have expertise and knowledge. Community organizations should seek out opportunities to work in partnerships with academic institutions, other grassroots organizations and environmental justice lawyers to build capacity through the resources of these entities.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: ADDRESSING DIFFERENCES

- 4. A The Principles of Working Together require affirmation of the value in diversity and the rejection of any form of racism, discrimination and oppression. To support each other completely, we must learn about our different cultural and political histories so that we can completely support each other in our movement inclusive of all ages, classes, immigrants, indigenous peoples, undocumented workers, farm workers, genders, sexual orientations and educational differences.
- 4. B The Principles of Working Together require respect, cultural sensitivity, patience, time and a willingness to understand each other and a mutual sharing of knowledge.
- 4. C The Principles of Working Together affirm the value in our diversity. If English is not the primary language, there must be effective translation for all participants.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: LEADERSHIP

- 5. A The Principles of Working Together demand shared power, community service, cooperation, open and honest communication.
- 5. B The Principles of Working Together demand that people from the outside should not come in and think that there is no leadership in the grassroots community. The people in

the community should lead their own community and create legacy by teaching young people to be leaders.

- 5. C The Principles of Working Together demand that people from grassroots organizations should lead the environmental justice movement.
- 5. D The Principles of Working Together demand accountability to the people, responsibility to complete required work and commitment to maintaining healthy partnerships with all groups.

PRINCIPLE SIX: PARTICIPATION

- 6. A The Principles of Working Together demand cultural sensitivity. This requires patience and time for each group to express their concerns, and their concerns should be heard.
- 6. B The Principles of Working Together require a culturally appropriate process.
- 6. C The Principles of Working Together commit to changing the process when the process is not meeting the needs of the people. The changes should be informed by the people's timely feedback and evaluation.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: RESOLVING CONFLICTS

- 7.A The Principles of Working Together encourage respectful discussion of our differences, willingness to understand, and the exploration of best possible solutions.
- 7. B The Principles of Working Together require that we learn and strengthen our cross-cultural communication skills so that we can develop effective and creative problem solving skills. This Principle promotes respectful listening and dialogue.
- 7. C The Principles of Working Together affirm the value in learning strengthening mediation skills in diverse socioeconomic and multicultural settings.

PRINCIPLE EIGHT: FUNDRAISING

- 8. A The Principles of Working Together recognize the need for expanding sustainable community-based avenues for raising funds, such as building a donor base, membership dues, etc.
- 8. B The Principles of Working Together oppose funding from any organization that negatively impacts people of color and indigenous communities. In addition, the Principles oppose funding from any organization that is the current target of active boycotts, or other campaign activity generated by our allies.
- 8. C The Principles of Working Together encourage larger environmental justice organizations to help smaller, emerging environmental justice organizations gain access to funding resources. We encourage the sharing of funding resources and information with other organizations in need.

PRINCIPLE NINE: ACCOUNTABILITY

9. A The Principles of Working Together encourage all partners to abide by the shared agreements, including, but not limited to, oral and written agreements. Any changes or developments to agreements/actions need to be communicated to all who are affected and agreed upon.
9. B The Principles of Working Together encourage periodic evaluation and review of process to ensure accountability among all partners. Any violation of these agreements or any unprincipled actions that violate the environmental justice principles, either:
1. Must attempt to be resolved among the partners
 2. Will end the partnership if not resolved AND
 3. Will be raised to the larger environmental justice community

Youth-to-Youth and Youth-to-Adult PRINCIPLES OF COLLABORATION

From the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit
Washington, DC, October 26, 2002

Introduction

This paper is about the Principles of Collaboration, guiding youth working together, and youth and adults working together. These principles are to be used as a guide to collaborations between all people and particularly those in the environmental justice movement.

We define “principles” as a foundation of set guidelines that keep you on track to reach an objective and final solution with integrity. We define “collaboration” as collectively working together to reach out and build alliances through understanding, communication, compromise and commitment to a common goal. Through collaboration we will build capacity to share resources and power.

Along with introducing the principles set by working groups of the youth caucus, this paper will explain the process we used to come up with these principles and an evaluation of that process. We began this process by telling stories and sharing our experiences of positive and negative collaboration. These stories were the foundation for the following principles of collaboration.

Principles of Youth-to-Youth Collaboration

1. Respect cultural, geographic and economic differences

We all come from different backgrounds, be they racial, economic, gender, sexual orientations, religious, spiritual, ethnic, ideological and/or spatial, like in our communities and neighborhoods. We must recognize the totality and unique quality of people’s experiences and not make assumptions about them. In that, we should have consideration for each person’s humanity, be careful not to offend those around us, and actively seek knowledge and understanding, when we don’t get it.

2. Respect one another’s time and space

We define space as both physical and mental. We must realize that we as people like to express ourselves and sometimes we use big words without knowing that we lead the conversation in a different direction. To stay in the right direction, we have to try not to repeat what someone else has said in a different statement.

3. Youth should have the space and opportunity to learn from and teach each other

It is necessary that we share the knowledge acquired through struggles, workshops, etc., with each other. Youth’s experiences are generally most relevant to and understood by other youth. Given that, we should not miss the opportunities for information and resource exchange amongst each other. Furthermore, we must cultivate a supportive environment that fosters youth learning.

4. Be open minded to everyone

We realize that the barriers to being open minded include such things as age, interests, experiences of oppres-sion, culture, language/talk and fears. Even so, it is the beliefs that must be challenged, not the person. Everyone must also be open to questioning their own beliefs, even if issues do not directly relate to them.

5. Maintain positive action between collaborators

Once a commitment is made, keep ideas flowing. Put action to thought, and don't start what you can't finish.

6. Be resourceful with the tools to be able to communicate with each other and agree how to use them

Recognize that there are different ways for people to communicate and a group must agree to use ways that accommodate all members of the group (phone, email, fax, letters, etc.). As people share and use these ways, understand that these become collective resources that can also help us set our own limits. Also, one must look for ways to make their voices heard. This process of identifying and using these different ways contributes to building leadership.

7. Have integrity in all aspects of collaboration, including communication, purpose, action and evaluation**8. Focus on the issue and make distinctions between personal and political situations**

Although we recognize that the personal is political, it is important for us not to confuse personal and organizational issues. When personal issues arise, deal with them in a one-on-one situation, take a moment before reacting to make sure that the challenge is of a personal nature and not a group issue, and respect the group space so as to not overwhelm the process with personal feelings. Furthermore, be considerate of people's feelings and sensitivities when critiquing the space and process of engagement and have the space to respectfully disagree.

9. Come to a similar understanding of what youth means, recognizing the cultural differences that exist in the definition of youth**10. Create, maintain and leave a legacy that other youth can learn from**

We should consistently develop the capacity of ourselves as we transition out of the youth category and create new space for new youth to fill. Older youth must check themselves on how much space they are taking up. We should also try not to burn bridges and we should present ourselves in a positive manner, while working toward solutions together in a stable condition and in a unified environment.

Principles of Youth-to-Adult, Adult-to-Youth Collaboration**1. Build common roots. Know and share with each other the experiences and perspectives of where people are coming from**

Trust that people speak to the best of their knowledge. When building common ground, know and understand what your goal is.

2. Respect experiences and passions regardless of age

Try to understand older/younger peoples' experiences. Do not assume you won't understand people's experiences; be open to them first. If you can't say anything in a respectful manner, then don't say anything at all.

3. Highlight and respect each others' experiences

Me at 15 is different from you at 15. We must share and listen to each other's stories, but as adults, you must beware when you compare. Respect each person's reality, regardless of their age, as their truth for that time. Don't belittle or demean their experiences because your reality is different or your experiences have led to another reality. Instead all must be in a space of open mindedness and compromise.

4. Work together with defined youth and adult roles

Make sure everyone defines and decides all roles. Adults should not be the ones making all decisions or having control, and leaving the youth to just follow. In addition, do not assume that certain roles are automatically for youth or for adults.

5. Understand the language and tone of youth

Respect the message of the youth. Respect the youth's words and commit to learning slang. Adults also need to keep listening to what youth say, and reflect it back to see the youth if what's said is understood until the youth feels like they are understood.

6. Have equal respectability and representation

Give people equal time to speak and share.

7. Reciprocate learning

Each person is both teacher and student. Acknowledge that everyone is in a space of learning. Give as much as you take, while providing everyone the time and space they need to learn. Come with an open mind.

8. Present opinions in a positive manner

Work towards solutions together in a stable condition and in a unified environment. Try not to burn bridges, and adults must check themselves on how much space they are taking up so as not to overstep their power on youth.

9. Have integrity in all aspects of collaboration, including communication, purpose, action and evaluation

10. Youth must not carry the baggage of the old school

While we realize historical relationships, as youth we cannot carry beefs from yesterday that could be potential allies today. We cannot try to let our issues of division tear us away from collective goals.

How we did this and who did this

How:

We started out by telling our stories of positive and negative experiences of collaboration. We wanted to use the negative experiences as lessons for how not to collaborate with each other, as well as the positive experiences as a good foundation for collaboration.

Positive experiences with collaboration fell in the following areas:

- Networking of communities and people
- Generation of new ideas and education
- Victories and support
- Building new allies and unity
- Building power, capacity and strategies to organize

Negative experiences fell in the following areas:

- Decision making
- Politics
- Views
- Values
- Campaign development
- Goal setting
- Agenda
- Strategy
- Objectives
- Communication
- Participation
- Voices not heard
- Follow through
- Role setting
- Leadership
- Money

Facilitation followed the following ground rules: Have space for younger youth to speak; stick to issue when we talk; and respect the process already committed to. In addition, facilitators created activities to make it as interactive as possible, and were conscious about creating a safe space for the younger youth to speak. Facilitators also broke the larger groups into small groups to allow for deeper discussion and further explanation on the principles that we came up with that could not have happened in a large group discussion. Small group discussions were brought back to the larger group for feedback. We also evaluated our process.

Positive outcomes included:

- Facilitation among younger and older youth
- Review of processes brought people up to speed
- We broke it down!
- Vibes!
- Flexibility
- We collaborated well

- People were already thinking about collaboration
- Thinking reflects a deep understanding

Areas to be improved include:

- Lack of space (because of event planning)
- Lack of time (because of event planning)
- Lost people (because of event planning)
- Scheduling of workshops/meetings (because of event planning)
- Lack of geographical diversity (because of event planning)
- Lack of respect for young people's prep time (because of event planning)

A Bibliography of References on Youth Organizing and Environmental Justice

Following are several publications that document many of the important groups not discussed in this report:

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About the Authors

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About the Movement Strategy Center

The Movement Strategy Center (MSC) provides organizational capacity building, power mapping, collective visioning tools, field research and alliance building facilitation for groups and individual leaders. MSC is committed to advancing the next generation of leadership for a sustainable progressive movement. For more information on our programs and publications, go to www.movementstrategy.org.

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