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OSI

WHITE PAPER

# YOUNG, GIFTED AND UNDERFUNDED

Strengthening the  
Relationship Between  
Philanthropy and  
Youth-Led Movements





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**A LETTER FROM  
OSI-BALTIMORE**

Open Society Institute-Baltimore is proud to present this important examination of youth leadership and philanthropy in our region. This report is a stark call to OSI-Baltimore and all local foundations to engage in this crucial conversation and make significant moves to create more opportunity and space for Baltimore's young people to act on their own behalf.

From OSI-Baltimore's founding in 1998, we have supported young people and youth leadership. In that first year, we founded the Baltimore Urban Debate League, which has served as a youth leadership development program. Its alumni have proven to be some of the most effective and outspoken youth leaders in Baltimore. Through our Community Fellows program, we have provided resources to 190 social entrepreneurs, many of them young people, working on projects of their own design in underserved communities. In addition to grant making, we have worked to build the capacity of youth leaders through technical assistance and mentorship. In the wake of the Uprising in April 2015 (which followed the arrest of Freddie Gray, who died of injuries sustained while in police custody), we founded the Baltimore Justice Fund to disperse funds to young leaders working in affected communities.

But we know that OSI-Baltimore, like all funders in our region, can and must do more.

Earlier this year, Tara Huffman, director of OSI-Baltimore's Criminal and Juvenile Program, requested funding from Open Society Foundations' Youth Exchange Fund—which was established to support young leaders globally—to examine the relationships between youth leaders and the philanthropic community in Baltimore. Based on conversations with local activists and colleagues at local foundations, Tara knew that those relationships, which have never been strong, were evolving as a result of the Uprising. She sensed that the time was right to take a closer look at, and potentially advance, the cause of increasing and diversifying support for youth-led groups in the region.

As this report shows, funding to youth-led groups grew significantly after the Uprising, but is still a very small percentage of total foundation funding in the region. Through focus groups with youth leaders, we learned that many worried that post-Uprising funding was merely a time-limited trend and that there would be little lasting change in local foundations' approach to youth-led organizations. In focus groups with foundation program officers, we learned that many want to increase support for youth-led groups, but structural barriers often prevent them from doing so.

Of course, focus groups cannot tell the full story. Nevertheless, the recommendations in this report offer an excellent starting point for further discussion with young leaders and foundation staff about how we can collectively leverage this moment to advance our shared goal of creating more space and opportunity for young people to organize and create change on their own behalf.

As OSI-Baltimore, we will continue to facilitate that conversation and advocate for the important changes that will be required to reach this goal.

In Solidarity,

**DIANA MORRIS**, *Director*

# A CALL TO ACTION FOR PHILANTHROPY

A LETTER FROM THE SUPPORTING YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROJECT ADVISORY BOARD

**It is said that our young people are our future. And it is true, they are. But they are also our present. Our leaders. Our dreamers. Our activists. Our organizers. And yes, our future.**

In an effort to support the future, philanthropic leaders in our communities have invested in programs, in education reform, and in proposed collective strategies that we believe create opportunities for young people to thrive. But have we truly invested in young people's necessary leadership? In their ideas? In their solutions?

This collaborative effort of OSI-Baltimore staff, researchers, consultants, advisory board members, philanthropic representatives, and young leaders sought to explore just that—holding conversations and conducting research to uncover where the dollars have been spent, to understand what it feels like to pursue those dollars, and to identify the barriers to implementing solutions driven by those most affected by the issues philanthropy purports to support.

What we learned:

- Nominal investments have been made directly to youth-led, youth-driven organizing and programmatic efforts in Baltimore.
- Structural barriers prevent access and opportunity for young people to receive philanthropic support.
- Minimal trust exists between foundations and young people.
- Foundations typically invest in organizations with perceived capacity, which tend to have white, older leaders.
- Young people perceive a culture of philanthropy that prioritizes trend-chasing, academic research and long track records of success, which serve as a hindrance to youth-led organization and their efforts to achieve change in the face of seemingly intractable problems.
- Foundation program officers and youth leaders are both seeking capacity building opportunities and professional development support—and they are seeking it from one another.
- Community-based investing and community-focused network building are essential to resolving the challenges young people and their communities face.

To the young leaders who took the time to answer our questions yet again, in your brilliant wisdom, you have called on philanthropy to explore the findings of this report, examine its assumptions, and challenge those policies and practices that create barriers to access. Thank you.

To our allies in philanthropy, we ask that you listen in a way that provokes you to step out of your offices, your comfort zones, and your existing structures to learn, to stretch, and to invest in the solutions of our young leaders in Baltimore and beyond.

Sincerely,

*Supporting Youth Leadership Project Advisory Board*



The image features a solid orange background with two thin, light-orange diagonal lines. One line runs from the top-left towards the bottom-right, and the other runs from the bottom-left towards the top-right. In the center, there is a white rectangular area containing the text "EXECUTIVE SUMMARY" in bold, white, uppercase letters. This text is framed by a thin orange border that has small triangular cutouts at the top-left and bottom-right corners.

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



## Introduction

Organizing and activism are hallmarks of social change efforts in Baltimore. Like many other major cities throughout the country, youth in Baltimore have been deeply engaged in our nation's most important social movements, helping to both initiate and lead change efforts since the early 1900s.<sup>1,2</sup> Baltimore's rich legacy of youth organizing and activism continues today, with youth serving on the frontlines of the April 2015 Uprising after the death of Freddie Gray and founding and/or fueling movements focused on police violence, education reform, immigration reform, and economic justice.

Historically, social change efforts led by youth, especially youth of color, have largely been disconnected from the billions of dollars that flow through the national philanthropic sector each year. To better understand the current relationship between youth leaders in Baltimore and foundations that fund locally as well as how philanthropy and youth-led movements in and beyond Baltimore can work together more effectively to bring about social change, the Open Society Institute-Baltimore ("OSI-Baltimore") commissioned the Supporting Youth Leadership Project (SYL Project). Ultimately, the initiative aims to help OSI-Baltimore identify how it and other foundations can better shape their grant making programs and practices to support youth activists and youth-led movements (defined for the purpose of this report as any nonprofit organization or unincorporated group whose executive leadership or primary decision-makers are 30 years of age or younger). This report flows from that project, and humbly provides both philanthropies and youth leaders with a roadmap to begin to bridge the disconnections between them.

<sup>1</sup> <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/baltimore-students-sit-us-civil-rights-1960>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/morgan-state-honors-its-civil-rights-sit-in-pioneers/2011/11/11/gIQAv8pWCN\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.1c0f82255198](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/morgan-state-honors-its-civil-rights-sit-in-pioneers/2011/11/11/gIQAv8pWCN_story.html?utm_term=.1c0f82255198)

## Summary of Key Findings

**1. THE 2015 UPRISING IN BALTIMORE APPEARS TO HAVE LED TO AN INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF FUNDING PROVIDED BY FOUNDATIONS TO LOCAL YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS.**

Funding of youth-led groups increased every year between 2012 and 2016, with steady increases taking place each year between 2012 and 2014 and more significant increases taking place in 2015 and 2016. The change in the level of funding suggests that some foundations responded to the 2015 Uprising by steering more funds toward youth-led organizations.

**2. YOUTH LEADERS INTERPRETED THE INCREASED LEVEL OF FUNDING TO YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS FOLLOWING THE 2015 UPRISING AS FOUNDATIONS BEING “TRENDY” OR “FEELING GUILTY.”**

Youth leaders expressed frustration that many foundations had not taken an intentional interest in funding youth leaders until after the Uprising. Some youth leaders also interpreted the influx of foundation funding into Sandtown-Winchester (the epicenter of the Freddie Gray tragedy) and other distressed communities after the Uprising as evidence of, and as an attempt to assuage, the guilt local foundations felt for not fully acknowledging and addressing the issues that led to the Uprising.

**3. WHILE FUNDING TO YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS INCREASED AFTER 2015, RELATIVE TO ALL INVESTMENTS IN BALTIMORE MADE BY FOUNDATIONS, THE LEVEL OF FUNDING IS STILL NOMINAL.**

Grants to youth-led organizations comprise a small proportion of all foundation grants, both prior to and after the 2015 Uprising. Across all foundation types, less than one percent (0.94%) of the grants awarded to Baltimore-area organizations between 2012 and 2016 were youth-led organizations. This disparity holds true even when the work being funded is specific to youth as opposed to general community needs.

**4. YOUTH FEEL THAT THEIR AGE PREVENTS FOUNDATIONS FROM TRUSTING THAT THEY HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.**

Between 2012 and 2016, foundations provided substantially larger amounts of funding to organizations led by older adults that were organizing youth than to youth organizations organizing youth. When asked to comment on this disparity, youth leaders felt that foundations think youth need “adult” supervision and are reluctant to fund them without such supervision. This sentiment was echoed by some program officers, who also believe that some foundations are hesitant to fund youth leaders because of the critical perspectives some youth leaders offer about the ways in which foundations do their work.

**5. YOUTH LEADERS SEE FOUNDATIONS' GRANT MAKING PROCESSES AS STRUCTURAL BARRIERS THAT ARE BURDENSOME, REFLECTIONS OF DISTRUST, AND MANIFESTATIONS OF RACIAL BIAS.**

Youth leaders who had previously engaged with foundations, both successfully and unsuccessfully, described application processes and grant reporting procedures as burdensome. Youth leaders also cited challenges in understanding the requirements associated with being eligible to receive funds. In addition to age, youth leaders and program officers alike perceived links among funding decisions, foundation systems and policies, and racial bias and white privilege, which they believe lead to disparate treatment. This finding is significant, given that most youth-led organizations engaged in organizing and activism in Baltimore are black-led.

**6. BOTH PROGRAM OFFICERS AND YOUTH LEADERS SEE SOME FOUNDATIONS BEGINNING TO IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES—SOMETIMES EFFECTIVELY AND SOMETIMES NOT—THAT ARE INTENDED TO MINIMIZE BARRIERS TO GRANTS FOR YOUTH-LED MOVEMENTS.**

Program officers acknowledged that the 2015 Uprising provoked some foundations to reflect on the way they do business and to begin to make reforms. Youth leaders agreed that they, too, have seen changes, but both groups agreed that challenges remain, including whether and how to use fiscal sponsors, when to follow program officer advice to collaborate, and program officer turnover.

**7. FOUNDATIONS' VALUES AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY ALIGN WITH THE VALUES OF YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS ARE PARAMOUNT IN YOUTH LEADERS' CONSIDERATION OF WHETHER TO SEEK FUNDING FROM A FOUNDATION.**

There is a strongly held belief that foundations in Baltimore do not share similar values with youth-led organizations. From the perspective of youth leaders, this creates a values mismatch that prevents many youth-led organizations from developing a funding relationship with foundations. No youth leader participant explicitly stated that he/she would never seek or accept foundation funding. The majority of participants, however, emphasized that the foundations from which they would most likely seek or accept funding would have values and practices that matched their own.

**8. YOUTH LEADERS PERCEIVE THE CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY AS ONE THAT CHASES TRENDS AND PRIORITIZES RESEARCH AND OTHER ACADEMIC INITIATIVES OVER COMMUNITY-INFORMED AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES, WHICH HINDERS GETTING FUNDING TO ADDRESS THE REAL ISSUES IN BALTIMORE COMMUNITIES.**

Youth leaders criticized the foundations for a tendency to chase trends, which they experience as negatively impacting their work. Specifically, the youth leaders claim that, in order to receive funding, they have to prioritize whatever the foundation is focused on that

day, which may not align with community priorities. This places youth leaders in a moral dilemma, having to decide whether to abandon or adjust their original, community-based mission for the sake of financial sustainability. Youth leaders also criticized foundations' academic approach to grant proposals and funding, suggesting that the approach may be a mismatch to what actually works on the ground for certain communities.

**9. IF FOUNDATIONS DESIRE TO WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS, THEY NEED TO BUILD OUT THEIR POTENTIAL GRANTEE NETWORKS AND VALUE COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES.**

While program officers described relationships as a key step to funding youth-led organizations, both youth leaders and program officers noted that youth leaders are rarely integrated into foundations' or program officers' networks. Youth expressed frustration with their exclusion from these networks, which perpetuates their lack of understanding of "the game" of philanthropy.

**10. BOTH PROGRAM OFFICERS AND YOUTH LEADERS ARE SEEKING CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT**

They emphasized the need for youth-led organizations to develop capacity for sustainability and organizational development. Youth leaders were frustrated by their lack of tools and support to help their organizations become self-sufficient and described capacity building as tools that could help their organizations become more sustainable and effective over time. For example, youth leaders shared a desire for foundation grants to help their organizations become more effective in engaging with philanthropies.

## **Recommendations For Foundations**

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** Conduct a scan of internal policies, processes, organizational practices and organizational culture to identify barriers that can be eliminated or reduced to support youth-led organizations better.

**RECOMMENDATION #2:** Include in the recommended scan an examination of how racial bias operates within and outside the foundation and implement strategies to bring about racial equity in grant making processes and decision-making.

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** Explicitly communicate to program officers that the foundation is open to supporting youth-led organizations and work with program officers to identify the best ways to support youth-led organizations.

**RECOMMENDATION #4:** Explore participatory grant making and the extent to which it can help break down barriers between the foundation and youth-led organizations.

**RECOMMENDATION #5:** Conceive of capacity building grants, training and technical assistance as tools to build relationships with youth-led organizations, introduce youth leaders to philanthropy, and reduce racial bias in grant making.

**RECOMMENDATION #6:** Implement multi-year funding for youth-led organizations.

**RECOMMENDATION #7:** When hiring staff, especially staff working as part of a place-based team, recruit from impacted communities.

## Recommendations For Youth-Led Organizations

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** Become educated about the ecosystem in which philanthropic institutions operate in order to understand the constraints as well as the opportunities for authentic partnerships.

**RECOMMENDATION #2:** Use informational interviews, teach-ins and peer-to-peer coaching to help improve one's own prospects or the prospects of a youth-led ally to receive foundation funding.

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** Respectfully and authentically provide feedback to program officers when a request for funding is denied or when the relationship feels like it is producing as much harm as good.



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# **INTRODUCTION**

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Organizing and activism are hallmarks of social change efforts in Baltimore. Like many other major cities throughout the country, youth in Baltimore, especially students from local colleges and universities, have been deeply engaged in our nation’s most important social movements, helping to initiate and lead change efforts since the early 1900s.<sup>3,4</sup> Baltimore’s rich legacy of youth organizing and activism continues today, with youth serving on the frontlines of the April 2015 Uprising after the death of Freddie Gray and founding and/or fueling movements focused on police violence, education reform, immigration reform, and economic justice.

Historically, social change efforts led by youth, especially youth of color, have largely been disconnected from the billions of dollars that flow through the national philanthropic sector each year. Rather, youth involved in these efforts have contributed their own money or in-kind resources—including food, their homes, and their talents—to ensure that the overall effort is successful. Today, organizers and activists continue to rely on themselves, their peers and members of the community for the resources needed to advance change efforts or movements. There is, however, increasing interest on the part of philanthropic institutions to support youth leaders and the movements they are leading, evidenced by an increase in grant funding to these groups. Nevertheless, a disconnect between youth leaders and philanthropies persists in a number of ways and for a number of reasons.

To understand better the current relationship between youth leaders in Baltimore and foundations that fund locally as well as how philanthropy and youth-led movements in and beyond Baltimore can work together more effectively to bring about social change, the Open Society Institute-Baltimore (“OSI-Baltimore”) commissioned the Supporting Youth Leadership Project (SYL Project). Specifically, the SYL Project is designed to help OSI-Baltimore identify how it and other foundations can shape their grant making programs and practices to support youth activists and youth-led movements better, with an emphasis on those that do not adhere to a “traditional” nonprofit organizational model. At the same time, the project is designed to demystify the philanthropic community for youth organizers and activists so that they can work more effectively with foundations.

This report flows from that project, and humbly provides both philanthropies and youth leaders with a roadmap to begin to bridge the disconnect. Our hope is that this report and other pieces of the larger project will lead to better-resourced youth-led movements, more developed young leaders, and sustained activism and advocacy over the long term.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/baltimore-students-sit-us-civil-rights-1960>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/morgan-state-honors-its-civil-rights-sit-in-pioneers/2011/11/11/glQAv8pWCN\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.1c0f82255198](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/morgan-state-honors-its-civil-rights-sit-in-pioneers/2011/11/11/glQAv8pWCN_story.html?utm_term=.1c0f82255198)





**PROJECT APPROACH  
AND METHODS**

OSI-Baltimore partnered with Equivolve Consulting, LLC (Equivolve) to manage the first phase of the project, which focused on defining the problem, proposing some preliminary solutions, and identifying an advisory board to serve as thought partners, suggest information sources, interrogate the project's findings, and help shape recommendations. Initial advisory board members also recommended other individuals to serve on the advisory board, resulting in a board of five individuals representing philanthropy and youth leaders in Baltimore.

OSI-Baltimore also engaged Equivolve to conduct a landscape analysis of the current state of funding to youth-led efforts in Baltimore as well as a series of focus groups with local youth leaders and with foundation program officers to solicit multiple perspectives.

## Landscape analysis

The purpose of the landscape analysis was to examine the levels of funding provided to youth-led organizations in the Baltimore metropolitan area between 2012 and 2016 by family, independent, corporate, community, and operating foundations. This time frame was chosen so that the analysis could include foundation support provided before and after the 2015 Uprising which, as explained in greater detail below, was a watershed moment for youth-led movements and grant making in Baltimore.

We defined the different types of foundations included in the analysis as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- **Family foundations**—usually funded by an endowment established by one or more family members. The family members have a substantial role in the foundation's governance and grant making.
- **Independent foundations**—distinct from other kinds of private foundations such as family or corporate foundations as they are not governed by the benefactor, the benefactor's family, or a corporation. They are usually funded by endowments from a single source, such as an individual or group of individuals.
- **Corporate foundations** (or company-sponsored foundations)—grant making organizations that are created and financially supported by a corporation. The foundation may be structured as a separate legal entity from the corporation, but either way has close ties to the corporation.
- **Operating foundations**—private foundations that primarily operate their own programs and services, although some also award grants.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cof.org/content/foundation-basics>

“Youth-led organization” was defined as any nonprofit organization or unincorporated group whose executive leadership or primary decision-makers are 30 years of age or younger. In cases of organizations with more than one primary leader, the majority of the organization’s key leaders or members had to be 30 years of age or younger to fit within the project’s focus.

“Baltimore metropolitan area” was defined as the U.S. Office of Management and Budget’s Baltimore-Columbia-Towson Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Of specific interest was foundation funding provided to youth-led organizations that engaged in community organizing, activism, advocacy, or leadership development between 2012 and 2016. In most cases, youth-led organizations identified themselves as such publicly, e.g., on their website. This was not always the case, however, so we conducted additional internet research to attempt to determine the ages of the leaders of organizations that appeared to be youth-led. When organizations could be verified as youth-led, they were included in the analysis.

We collected data on grants from a variety of publicly available sources, including: 39 Baltimore area foundations that listed their grants online or in publicly available annual or grant reports; websites and reports of youth-led groups that were identified during the scan; the Foundation Center’s Foundation Directory Online, which catalogues grants from foundations across the United States; and GuideStar, which collects 990 tax reporting forms from all nonprofits in the United States. Grants from the various sources were cross-checked to prevent duplication. We also consulted several local and national foundation membership organizations for help identifying foundations that should be included in the landscape analysis. None of these membership organizations produced grants lists.

## Focus groups

OSI-Baltimore retained Jessica Young, Ph.D., to serve as the SYL Project focus group facilitator. Young worked with OSI-Baltimore and Equivolve to design the focus groups, develop the focus group guide, facilitate the focus group discussions, compile findings from the focus groups into a report, and suggest recommendations based on those findings.

Young conducted three focus groups between July and August 2017: two focus groups with local youth leaders and one focus group with program officers from Baltimore-area foundations. Youth leaders were defined as young people between the ages of 18-30 who were involved in community activism or organizing within Baltimore or are otherwise serving the needs of local residents. Program officers were defined as those who have

recently worked (within the last year) or currently work in a grant making foundation in Baltimore and have worked with or funded Baltimore youth leaders. Program officers who were invited to participate in the focus group were also required to have, within their role at a foundation, some grant making responsibility or authority to develop partnerships with local entities.

Focus group participants were identified using a purposive sampling approach as opposed to a random sampling approach, which means participants were intentionally selected because they met the criteria as defined above. A consequence of this approach is that we cannot say that focus participants were representative of all program officers or youth leaders within Baltimore. Participants, however, are credible sources of information and insight given the project's focus.

Members of the Advisory Board helped to identify potential participants for the three focus groups. A semi-structured protocol was developed for each group, allowing opportunities to explore an issue raised in the discussion while still covering key topics. (Protocols are available upon request.) On average, each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes.

A total of 13 youth leaders participated in the two focus groups. The first youth leader focus group had seven participants, four women and three men. Six participants were black, and one participant was white. The second youth leader focus group had six participants, all men of color. Five participants were black, and one was Latino. Youth leaders were from a variety of backgrounds, with several youth representing the arts and education communities.

The program officer focus group had five participants, three women and two men. Two of the participants were black and three were white. All program officers were currently working or had worked in foundations that serve Baltimore communities in a variety of areas.

Youth leaders had been involved in activism or organizing from one month to 15 years, and program officer participants had been in philanthropy from two months to 11 years. The range of experience within both groups helped us gain perspective from those who have longer histories in and better understanding of the nuances of their respective group, as well as from those who are new to activism or grant making and whose insights were based on first impressions.

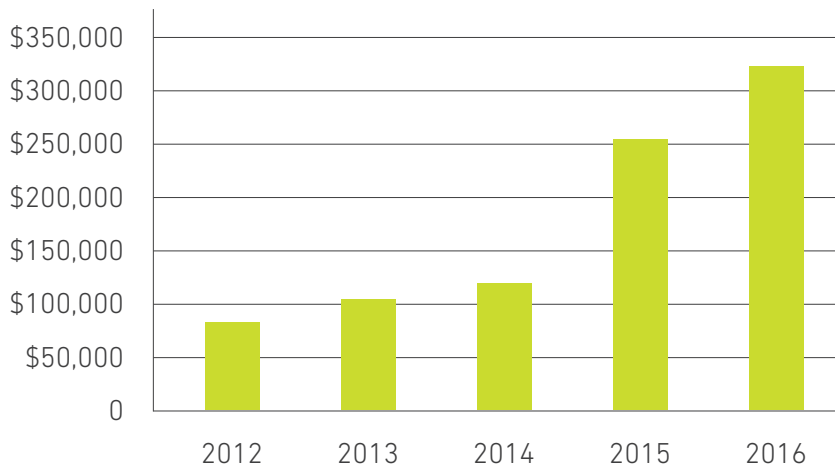


# FINDINGS

**1. THE 2015 UPRISING IN BALTIMORE APPEARS TO HAVE LED TO AN INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF FUNDING PROVIDED BY FOUNDATIONS TO YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN BALTIMORE.**

Foundation funding of youth-led groups increased every year between 2012 and 2016, with steady increases taking place each year between 2012 and 2014 and more significant increases taking place in 2015 and 2016 (see table below). In 2015, the amount foundations awarded to Baltimore youth-led organizations more than doubled, increasing from \$122,818 to \$254,568. This sharp change in the level of funding suggests that some foundations responded to the 2015 Uprising by steering more funds toward youth-led organizations. Seventeen foundations supported Baltimore area youth-led organizations in either 2015 or 2016, while only eight supported such entities between 2012 and 2014. Of the 17 foundations funding youth-led organizations in 2015 or 2016, 13 of them had not supported youth-led organizations between 2012 and 2014.

**Youth-Led Funding in Baltimore**



**2. YOUTH LEADERS INTERPRET THE INCREASED LEVEL OF FUNDING TO YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS AS FOUNDATIONS BEING “TRENDY” OR “FEELING GUILTY” RATHER THAN BEING SUBSTANTIALLY RESPONSIVE TO YOUTH LEADERS AND THE LONG-STANDING COMMUNITY NEEDS THAT YOUTH SEEK TO ADDRESS.**

Most youth leaders who participated in the focus groups expressed frustration that many foundations had not taken an intentional interest in funding youth leaders until after the Uprising. One youth leader described feeling like the organizations that received the most funding after the death of Freddie Gray were larger organizations whose focus was elsewhere prior to April 2015 and that suddenly became interested in the issues that smaller, community-based organizations—including youth-led organizations—have been working on for a long time:

This has been going on for a long time [...] that's what happened with the whole Freddie Gray money. People who are doing the work are not getting the money, and people who all of a sudden has [sic] found this new heart to do the work is getting the money, rather than the people who have been doing it for a minute, for a minute, for a minute, who's doing it humble [and] getting passed over.

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Youth Leader

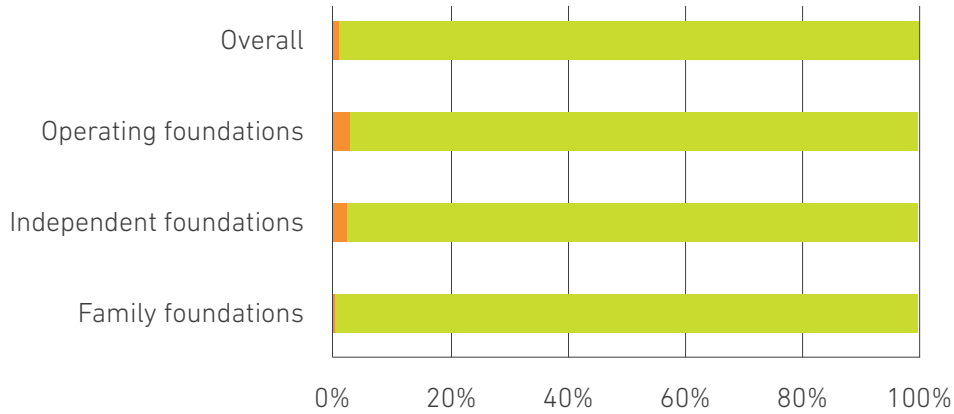
This line of discussion was associated with a belief among youth leaders that foundations do not listen to the community's needs when making funding priorities and, instead, follow the trends of the day when deciding what types of work to fund and who receives the funding. The discussion did not focus on the other ways foundations seek to meet community needs outside of funding youth-led organizations. Youth leaders largely felt that foundations have a history of excluding them as potential partners who warrant long-term, just not periodic, investment.

Some youth leaders also interpreted the influx of foundation funding into Sandtown-Winchester (the epicenter of the Freddie Gray tragedy) and other distressed communities after the Uprising as evidence of, and as an attempt to assuage the guilt local foundations felt for not fully acknowledging and addressing the issues that led to the Uprising. This perceived "philanthropic guilt" was not viewed favorably by youth participants, and highlighted a potential challenge to building trusting relationships between foundations and youth leaders. This sentiment was echoed by some participants in the program officer focus group, who reported that they had reached out to the youth leaders they were already investing in to confirm the sincerity of their commitment to continuing those investments.

**3. WHILE FUNDING TO YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS INCREASED AFTER 2015, RELATIVE TO ALL INVESTMENTS IN BALTIMORE MADE BY FOUNDATIONS, THE LEVEL OF FUNDING IS STILL NOMINAL.**

Grants to youth-led organizations constitute a small proportion of all foundation grants both prior to and after the 2015 Uprising. Across all foundation types, less than one percent (0.94%) of the grants awarded to Baltimore-area organizations between 2012 and 2016 were awarded to youth-led organizations. Family foundations awarded the smallest number of grants to youth-led organizations, while independent and operating foundations awarded slightly more. This disparity holds true even when the work being funded is specific to youth as opposed to general community needs. The following chart illustrates these findings.

**Youth-Led Grants as a Percentage of All Grants  
2012-2016 Combined**



It is important to note that this chart only reflects the number of grants awarded, not the grant amounts. On average, youth-led organizations tend to receive smaller grants than organizations led by older adults, thus the disparity would be even greater when considering total funding amounts. It is also important to note that, in terms of the entire potential grantee universe, organizations led by older adults comprise the overwhelming majority whereas youth-led organizations represent only a small percentage. Nevertheless, the available evidence suggest that youth-led organizations are not receiving a proportionate share of available grant funding.

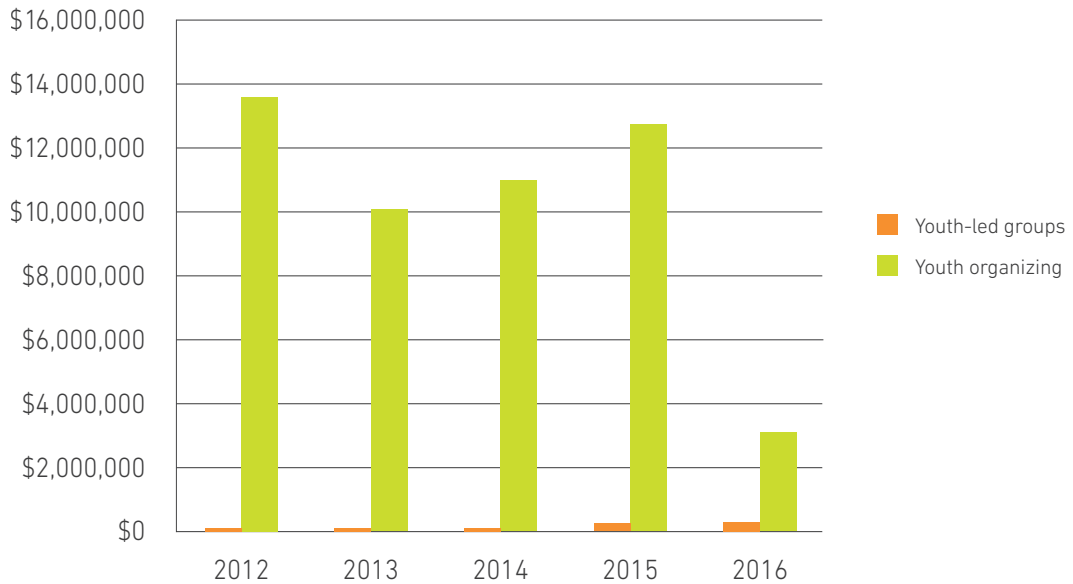
Youth leaders expressed a keen awareness of this disparity. They also expressed frustration with having to compete with other nonprofits for limited foundation funding, describing the grant seeking process as an invitation to “fight over crumbs” for grants as small as \$5,000, rather than an opportunity to collaborate with other organizations doing similar work.

**4. YOUTH FEEL THAT THEIR AGE PREVENTS FOUNDATIONS FROM TRUSTING THAT THEY HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.**

As noted above, most foundation funding for even youth-related work is not provided to youth-led organizations but to organizations led by older adults. Between 2012 and 2016, foundations provided substantially larger amounts of funding to organizations led by older adults that were organizing youth than to youth organizations organizing youth. In 2015, for instance, foundations gave about 50 times as much money to adult-led organizations conducting youth organizing in Baltimore (\$12.7 million) as they gave to youth-led organizations in the city (\$255,000).



### Foundation Support for Youth-led Groups vs. Youth Organizing



When asked to comment on this disparity, youth leaders felt that foundations think youth need “adult” supervision and are reluctant to fund them without such supervision.

**People think that just because we’re young that we can’t do it, so they don’t want to give us money.**

\_\_\_\_ Youth Leader

Not all youth leaders denied the benefit of involvement with older adults. One youth leader embraced the idea of having older adults involved in running youth-led organizations—in a hybrid organizational structure—to help ensure organizational continuity. This youth leader was concerned about youth-led organizations having leaders that “age-out” of leadership positions without a peer successor, stating “...we’re cranking out youth leaders rather than having organizations run by youth leaders.” In his/her mind, hybrid organizations that are youth-led but have an “adult” advisory board have an increased ability to “outlive the young person.” One program officer echoed this concern and stated that his/her foundation is always interested in “next generation accountability,” in order to give not just one but a succession of young people the space and opportunity to practice leadership.

On the foundation side, some program officers acknowledged that they face difficulties in convincing their institutions to fund youth-led organizations because of perceived risks related to a lack of “adult” supervision. Other program officers, however, believed that

some foundations are hesitant to fund youth leaders because of the critical perspectives youth leaders offer about the way foundations do their work and how youth believe foundations should be doing their work.

**Youth leadership won't just wander away. If we bring them into dialogue, then they're going to hold us accountable. I think at a certain level, a lot of our institutions are aware of that and are rightly afraid of what those implications are.**

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Program Officer

#### 5. YOUTH LEADERS SEE FOUNDATIONS' GRANT MAKING PROCESSES AS STRUCTURAL BARRIERS THAT ARE BURDENSOME, REFLECTIONS OF DISTRUST AND MANIFESTATIONS OF RACIAL BIAS.

Youth leaders repeatedly noted the challenges they face when seeking funding from foundations.

Those who had previously engaged with foundations, both successfully and unsuccessfully, described application processes and grant reporting procedures as burdensome. One youth leader participant felt that the reporting mandates implied that foundations do not trust the organizations to manage funds they receive successfully. The youth leader expressed the desire that foundations let youth-led organizations do the work and continued to say that:

**Their process isn't supporting our work. It's actually infringing upon our work. It's roadblocks to our work.**

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Youth Leader

Youth also expressed consternation about how to collect the data that foundations expected them to include in their grant applications and reports. Some expressed a lack of understanding of the reasons that foundations were interested in certain types of data reporting and did not see how the types of data they were asked to provide were related to their performance or grant management. A few youth leaders expressed particular frustration with foundations' emphasis on quantitative data as opposed to qualitative data for their funding decisions and for grant reporting.

**People are not numbers. Yeah, numbers don't lie but they don't tell stories either [...]. You can have a foundation that gives a nonprofit a nice hefty grant, and this nonprofit sets out in their proposal that 'we're gonna [sic] reach this many people, and they're going to be able to do this, that, and the third,' and when the year is over and the**

number is met, what's next? Okay, you got this person help with this, but they're still on government assistance, so what was the point? Did you really help them out for that year? What transformational difference did you make in that year?

\_\_\_\_ Youth Leader

In addition to the above, youth leaders discussed difficulties in understanding the requirements associated with being eligible to receive funds. For example, one youth leader pointed to the lack of knowledge some youth leaders have when it comes to setting up different types of legal entities, such as a 501(c)(3) or a limited liability company (LLC).

Taken together, these challenges—application processes, learning the “language” of philanthropy, eligibility and reporting requirements, and having to figure out how to fit their non-traditional ideas or approaches into the traditional frameworks and approaches set forth by foundations—communicate to youth leaders that foundations do not trust or value their expertise because of their age.

Age is not the only barrier youth leaders reported experiencing. Across all three focus groups, participants perceived links among funding decisions, foundation systems and policies, and racial bias and white privilege, which they believe lead to disparate treatment.

As noted above, between 2012 and 2016 foundations provided more funding to organizations led by older adults that were organizing youth than to youth-led organizations. An examination of where youth organizing support was concentrated within Baltimore (see map below) also reveals disproportionate support to organizations that were located in and/or primarily did their work in the whiter and more affluent



neighborhoods of the City, such as the Inner Harbor, Federal Hill, and Mount Vernon. Each dot on the map represents the listed address (typically the office location) of the awarded nonprofit. The size of each dot represents the total amount of funding received from 2012 to 2016. These patterns of investment look similar to other maps displaying the allocation of resources in Baltimore.

Many participants observed that foundations have the tendency to fund white organizations to drop into black neighborhoods to do work that aligns with the foundation's interests or needs, but does not align with the community's interests or needs. Some youth felt that foundations were also more likely to fund white organizations to do work that black-led organizations are already doing in their communities, as highlighted by this exchange between two youth leaders:

**[Foundations] give a lot of money to these white creatives and white artists to do the work that we could be doing ourselves [...].**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Youth Leader 1

**That we do every day!**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Youth Leader 2

**That we already do. I get frustrated when I see things like that.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Youth Leader 1

One program officer echoed this sentiment and offered a provocative explanation of how foundations justify the disparate treatment:

**Race is absolutely a factor, but it's often obscured by things like 'youth organizations don't have capacity.' That's not what we're really saying. What we're also saying is that black-led organizations don't have sophistication, don't have capacity. When we talk about community organizing, we say that we don't do community organizing because it's fallen out of vogue over the past, you know, 20 years, but what we're really talking about in Baltimore, and in other communities with high concentrations of people of color, is that we're not supporting black leadership; we're not supporting black residents' agency and self-determination.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Program Officer

Youth leaders also felt that larger, white-run organizations were given certain privileges that were denied to smaller, black-led organizations, such as more leeway to make mistakes in the application or reporting process, as well as a presumption that the organization is doing what it was funded to do. Furthermore, youth leaders believed that even though they do not receive the same support as large, white-led organizations, they are expected to operate and perform like those organizations and are penalized for their perceived lack of "sophistication" when they do not. All of this signaled to the youth leaders that foundations are more comfortable with and place a higher level of trust in large, white-led nonprofits. This finding is significant, given that most youth-led organizations engaged in organizing and activism in Baltimore are small and black-led.

**6. BOTH PROGRAM OFFICERS AND YOUTH LEADERS SEE SOME FOUNDATIONS BEGINNING TO IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES—SOMETIMES EFFECTIVELY AND SOMETIMES NOT—THAT ARE INTENDED TO REDUCE BARRIERS TO GRANTS FOR YOUTH-LED MOVEMENTS.**

Program officers agreed that some requirements placed on youth-led and other smaller organizations present structural barriers to foundations working closely with those who have the most experience and credibility with the needs of target communities. For some program officers, the very nature of youth-led organizations, such as their flexibility, mobility, and varying organizational structures, compounded the problem. The challenge that program officers see is the traditional approach to funding shared by many foundations, and the difficulty associated with getting foundations to be open to new, unfamiliar approaches. Program officers suggested that real change requires not just good intentions on the part of foundation leaders, but different policies and practices.

Some program officers, however, acknowledged that the Uprising provoked some foundations to reflect on the way they do business, with one program officer stating that s/he was “encouraged by the fact that, institutionally, we seem to be changing in perspective and policy, which is difficult for any institutional philanthropy.” Program officers reported leveraging the Uprising to initiate or increase reforms in order to partner better with youth-led organizations, including by offering non-funding resources to help support organizations, such as professional development activities, as well as by directing funds to organizations that are perceived to be less of a risk and can serve as an intermediary and re-grant to youth organizers.

As evidence of these efforts, some youth leaders highlighted positive experiences with foundations that are attempting to adopt practices that are less burdensome and more flexible and that demonstrate a genuine interest in learning how to partner more effectively with youth leaders. One youth leader described how s/he enjoyed working with a particular foundation because the process is simple. S/he described the foundation as being interested in how the money was being spent, but also said that the foundation encouraged his/her organization to share information in a way that suited it. For example, rather than requiring the organization to collect new data for the purpose of grant reporting, the foundation encouraged the youth leader to include data that the organization already collected. This flexibility meant the youth leader’s organization didn’t have to develop new data collection processes or collect data on new indicators. Another youth leader described a positive experience with a foundation that regularly checked in with the grantee through emails and surveys. The foundation regularly asked not only about the progress of the grantee’s work, but also for feedback on the foundation’s support and performance:

I see them living out the dreams that they sold [...] it's just different [...] feeling valued and invested in by a foundation.

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Youth Leader

Despite this progress, challenges remain. For example, the strategy of using an intermediary or fiscal sponsor to get funding to youth-led organizations received mixed reviews from youth leaders. One youth leader discussed how a fiscal sponsor was supportive in helping the organization submit a grant proposal successfully that previously had been unsuccessful. Another youth leader, however, described his/her relationship with a fiscal sponsor as adding another layer of bureaucracy in the funding relationship, which negatively impacted his/her work and internal processes. As one participant summed up, "In some ways it's helpful, but in other ways it's added B.S." One program officer, who recognized that having a fiscal sponsor may not be beneficial to some youth leaders and their work, is exploring examples from other states of funding non-traditional organizations without having to go through a fiscal sponsor while still meeting IRS guidelines.

Another strategy that received mixed reviews was encouraging youth-led organizations to collaborate in order to receive funding. Several youth leaders suggested that, rather than competing against one another or other organizations for small amounts of funding, it may make sense to partner when working on similar issues. One program officer described the boundaries between youth-led organizations as porous, which made it difficult to determine who is doing what and therefore who should be funded. Encouraging youth-led organizations to work together was seen as a way to get around the blurred lines. Another program officer, however, offered a contrary view, arguing that often the boundaries between youth-led organizations are, in fact, clear and efforts are not duplicative. S/he went on to warn against the potential harm that could arise from encouraging youth-led organizations to collaborate more closely when those organizations have different ways of analyzing issues, different understanding of community priorities and approaches, and take different positions on issues. The extent that collaboration between organizations for purposes of grant making is ideal may depend on the organizations involved and the specific issue that is targeted.

Yet another challenge is program officer turnover. One youth leader remarked that youth-led and other small organizations often get funded because of one program officer "that's going to look outside of the box and want to go out and talk to people" to figure out a way to support the work. Once that particular program officer leaves the position, however, the youth-led organization's relationship with that foundation is often not sustained.

7. FOUNDATION'S VALUES AND THE EXTENT THAT THEY ALIGN WITH THE VALUES OF YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS ARE PARAMOUNT IN YOUTH LEADERS' CONSIDERATION OF WHETHER TO SEEK FUNDING FROM A FOUNDATION.

Among the youth leaders that participated in the focus groups, there is a strongly held belief that foundations in Baltimore do not share similar values with youth-led organizations. From the perspective of youth leaders, this creates a values mismatch that prevents many youth-led organizations from developing a funding relationship with foundations. No youth leader participant explicitly stated that s/he would never seek or accept foundation funding. The majority of participants, however, emphasized that the foundations from which they would most likely seek or accept funding would have values and practices that matched their own.

Diversity within the foundation was identified as one place where there is a values mismatch. Multiple youth leaders were not interested in engaging with foundations that did not have staff or a board that was composed of individuals who reflect the diversity of Baltimore or the populations that the youth-led organizations serve. This principled position informs, and explains, how youth leaders interpret the funding relationships between foundations and white-led nonprofits whose leadership mirrors that of foundations but does not represent the neighborhoods or communities they purport to serve.

Another mismatch appears to be between a foundation's stated values and its actual practices. For example, some youth observed that foundations publicly claim that they want to support certain types of leaders or organizations but the way they engage and interact with youth leaders does not reflect respect for youth leaders' expertise, knowledge, and local authority. One program officer echoed this perceived discrepancy, stating:

**They say they want youth leaders, they want black youth leaders, and they want female leaders on top of that, but they constantly step over your words or your authority [...], not even respecting the fact that youth leadership is here [...]. We're not really going anywhere."**

\_\_\_\_\_ Program Officer

Yet another identified values mismatch was reflected in the different ways in which foundation staff and youth leaders tend to think and talk about Baltimore. One youth leader expressed a desire to see foundations fund and publish more reports that paint the city more positively. The leader expressed frustration at what s/he perceived as a constant stream of publications that convey "pessimism and distraught," describing Baltimore as a "black, torn ghetto engulfed in fire." S/he desired another narrative of Baltimore that does not imply that Baltimore is "in need of a savior," as another

youth leader described it, but instead has assets and resources that are centered in the black community.

The perceived mismatch in values has led some youth-led organizations to seek alternative sources of funding, mainly through fee-for-service or contracted services. Crowdfunding was briefly discussed, although this was not always described as a preferred funding source. While a few youth leaders relied on crowdfunding or planned to do so in the future, one youth leader discussed crowdfunding as a dilemma. Small organizations require financial support to help their community, but crowdfunding within that community means taking resources away from a community that is already resource-limited. Yet, without funding, the organization is unable to support their community. Despite this discomfort, however, the youth leader preferred relying on this method rather than funds from a foundation with values that did not match their own.

**8. YOUTH LEADERS PERCEIVE THE CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY AS ONE THAT CHASES TRENDS, PRIORITIZES RESEARCH AND OTHER ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES OVER COMMUNITY-INFORMED AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES, WHICH SERVES AS A HINDRANCE TO GETTING FUNDING TO ADDRESS THE REAL ISSUES IN BALTIMORE COMMUNITIES EFFECTIVELY.**

Youth leaders criticized foundations for what they see as a tendency to chase trends. From their perspective, youth had been working on the problems that led to the Uprising for years, but foundations largely did not provide support until it was popular to do so. Even then, foundations tended to provide funding for what they wanted to do, as opposed to what the community needed.

Youth leaders described this trend-chasing phenomenon as negatively impacting their work, claiming that, in order to receive funding, an organization has to prioritize whatever the foundation is focused on that day, which may not align with community priorities. This placed youth leaders in a moral dilemma, having to decide whether to abandon or adjust their original, community-based mission for the sake of financial sustainability.

**You have 501(c)3s who are confronted with 'I need this money, so do I change the fundamental thing that I've been doing for all this time, or do I adhere to what the foundation wants me to work on so that I can get that check' because, like you said, I'm trying to get people here for the next go round and the next go round after that and it costs money to do that.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Youth Leader



Foundations will often shape their proposals [and say] 'this is what our favorite color is today' and your organization has to all of a sudden love blue even if you were loving red all week, even if the community tells you yellow is what we need. I've watched too many organizations begin to get diverted because the foundation, the philanthropic community began to go in different directions.

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Youth Leader

Some youth leaders suggested that larger nonprofits do not have to be concerned with adapting to foundations' priorities because these organizations are "overvalued" and can "ride a wave of success" to continue to get funding, even if that "success" is mediocre and does not have lasting effects on the community.

Similarly, some youth leaders expressed frustration with the perceived reactionary approach funders use to identify priorities.

I think one of the frustrations with those buzzwords that we talked about in regards to those grant applications is that we find these funders, not all of them, but some of these funders and the ones that seem the most appealing are reactionary. They're looking for the organization that's ready to jump on the issue that's "hot" and they're looking for the organization that's ready to put people on the ground to eradicate something that they think is going to give them the good publicity, when this problem has been affecting people of color before these organizations set up shop in the city.

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Youth Leader

The youth leader went on to describe how the language used to describe an issue changes over time to match how it is currently being described by others outside of the community, using opioids as an example. Twenty to 30 years ago, the community understood the problem as one with heroin, and now the problem is described as related to opioids, which may not resonate with how the community perceives the problem now or historically.

In addition to perceived trend-chasing, several youth leaders spoke of philanthropy's "expert culture," particularly in terms of foundations seeking and funding technical or conceptual expertise. This suggested to youth leaders that foundations rely on and value the perspectives of academics and think tanks, but not impacted communities, to describe the problem and prescribe solutions.

When you talk about folks on the ground who know the issues intimately and then know how to get the work done, they just need a little bit of money to get the work done, but [foundations] go somewhere else because of whatever the reason is. It's not helpful. So, one of the solutions I wanted to offer is this: instead of looking outside at whatever firm for whatever their prestige is [...], the people who know the answers. They're right here [...]. They're on Penn North; they live Penn North; they understand it.

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Youth Leader

One youth leader discussed foundations' academic approach to grant proposals and funding, suggesting that the approach may be a mismatch to what actually works on the ground for certain communities. S/he described how, compared to youth-led and direct service organizations that are hustling to do work on the ground daily, foundation staff have more time to sit in their "ivory tower" and think. Foundation staff then expect grant proposals to reflect their thinking and incorporate specific studies and research-based frameworks to which community-based organizations have not been exposed. Privileging a purely academic approach over a lived-experience approach limits who receives funding and undervalues the work of organizations whose practices may not be based on an academic study but reflect what works in their respective communities.

For the folks who have time to sit and think and who are also giving the money out, foundations are looking for, they're looking at things from an academic standpoint, so who's using XYZ framework from the ivory tower to make this thing go. And, honestly, the work on the ground, it may be better positioned for folks on the ground to do it their way, that isn't based in some research [...], a study. It may not work better that way because I'm on the ground and I'm doing it that way, but when you're writing your grant, if you don't talk about this framework or mention this study as part of your background, now you're behind the bar because you won't seem as educated. Then it goes back to those buzzwords. If you aren't using the framework, if you aren't using those buzzwords, then the likelihood of you getting the grant is a lot smaller than those folks who are doing it. But those folks who are doing it had exposure to it at some point along the game.

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Youth Leader

Leaders in the community may not have formal educations, but the same solutions that they have in mind, and had in mind for the longest time, are the same solutions that [foundations] paid a think tank for. And sometimes theirs is completely wrong, and this is filled with academics [...]. Don't brush these people off because they didn't come from these institutions. These people have been talking about these solutions since the problem came up and 'cause you just got aware of the problem, even though it's been a problem for 15, 20 years, but it just came to your attention and you want to find a solution for it [...]. But for the leaders in the community, that's their Sunday morning; that's their Friday night. They knew that was the solution, but couldn't get a hold of you because you're upstairs and you don't want to come down the elevator.

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Youth Leader

Some youth spoke of foundations that had at least a budding culture of engaging community to identify both priorities and solutions. Youth leaders saw those foundations as believing that the community understands its problems and knows how to fix them.

**9. IF FOUNDATIONS DESIRE TO WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS, THEY NEED TO BUILD OUT THEIR POTENTIAL GRANTEE NETWORKS AND VALUE COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES.**

While program officers described relationships as a key step to funding youth-led organizations, both youth leaders and program officers noted that youth leaders are not integrated into foundations' or program officers' networks. Youth expressed frustration with their exclusion from these networks, which perpetuates their lack of understanding of "the game" of philanthropy:

We've seen a pattern that if you don't know someone or have a connection, and you're not in, sometimes you're not even allowed to apply if you're not invited, so how do you even get invited if you don't have a connection to that foundation to begin with?

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Youth Leader

Building out potential grantee networks includes prioritizing the development and empowerment of youth leaders. The landscape analysis showed that, among grants to youth-led organizations in the Baltimore area, foundations only recently began to place priority on supporting organizing, advocacy, and youth leadership development. For example, up until 2015, a single youth-led organization in Baltimore that focuses on arts education and appreciation received more foundation support than six youth-led

organizations engaged in organizing, advocacy, or leadership development combined. Foundations' increased appreciation for youth-led organizing and advocacy work since the Uprising is a start, but there is still work to be done to get foundation support of these organizations to a level that is commensurate with foundation support to other types of organizations.

Building out potential grantee networks also includes proactively exposing potential grantees to the foundation and its work. A few youth leaders emphasized that, while there may be Baltimore foundations that would be interested in supporting their work, seeking foundation funds has not been a natural part of their community's culture. Rather, they described their culture as being centered on reaching into their own communities to share resources, including non-financial resources such as food and clothing, that could support their mission, rather than seeking outside help. In order to broaden the range of funding partnerships between youth leaders and foundations, youth leaders expressed their desire for foundations to come out to the community to learn who is "really doing the work."

Program officers expressed a desire to engage with youth-led organizations and stated that some of their colleagues have a similar desire. Other program officers thought that they and their institutions were not well-equipped to engage with youth-led organizations, especially in ways that would help colleagues or board members who may be skeptical of funding these organizations to value youth voice and leadership. Some program officers were also reluctant to enter community spaces and relationships while feeling ill-equipped to engage with communities and/or concerned about unintended consequences. One program officer stated that more funders could be mobilized if there were defined ways for them to become better educated and equipped to enter these spaces and relationships.

Nonetheless, program officers believed that listening to and elevating communities with their peers were ways to help communities feel valued and improve the practice of philanthropy. One program officer also discussed the need to construct a theory of philanthropy that helps foundations engage authentically with communities and gain a greater understanding of what the barriers are and what structures need to change.

## 10. BOTH PROGRAM OFFICERS AND YOUTH LEADERS ARE SEEKING CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT.

Both program officers and youth leaders emphasized the need for youth-led organizations to develop capacities that contribute to their sustainability and organizational development. Youth leaders expressed frustration with the lack of tools and support they have to help their organizations become sustainable and self-sufficient, with the goal of not having to rely on the “grant loop” to fulfill their organizational mission.

Some program officers were hesitant to focus on capacity development among youth-led organizations. They discussed possible unintended consequences, thinking that a focus on capacity building could reinforce the negative stereotypes that youth-led organizations are incapable of successfully achieving goals or managing resources and that young people need capacity building in order to be considered worthy of investment.

Youth leaders framed capacity building more positively, describing it as tools that could help their organizations become more sustainable and effective over time. For example, youth leaders shared a desire for grants to help their organizations become more effective in engaging with philanthropies. One youth stated:

**Teach me how to operate my business within this field [of philanthropy]. Or teach me how to go find a [Certified Public Accountant]. Teach me about the language. Teach me about grant writing. Where are the grants that allow me to learn how to come to the table?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Youth Leader

Youth leaders also expressed a desire for foundations to go outside of their typical funding geographies and reach out to small nonprofits based and operating in places with the most need for capacity building efforts. They asked, “Where are the grant writing workshops in Sandtown-Winchester?”

Part of what is required to make youth leaders feel valued in relationships with program officers is ensuring that the relationships are bi-directional. This two-way partnership requires open communication by both parties. Youth leaders described positive experiences with foundations as being grounded in the feeling that the foundations were invested in their long-term growth, even beyond the grant period, which was evidenced by support of individual professional development.

Participants in all focus groups discussed ways other than funding by which foundations could support youth leaders. These suggestions focused on developing skills that will

help the organization in the long term, such as evaluation and strategic planning. Youth leaders felt that foundations and fiscal sponsors have a responsibility to invest in funding relationships with small organizations, since both entities benefit from the work of the funded organizations.

In the context of a desire to create two-way partnerships, program officers suggested capacity building activities to help foundation staff engage more effectively with youth leaders, including by examining infrastructure-related issues and thinking of different ways to deploy capital to youth leaders and to build relationships. Some program officers also described a desire for their foundations to become better learning organizations and to listen to communities and youth leaders so they are better positioned to meet communities' needs.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the landscape analysis and focus groups with youth leaders and program officers suggest several recommendations for ways that foundations can better support youth leaders, the primary focus of the SYL Project. The findings also surface a few recommendations for youth-led organizations that wish to work effectively and authentically with foundations to advance social justice. Both sets of recommendations are grounded in the assumption that there are some non-negotiables for both groups, for example, legal requirements established by the Internal Revenue Service for foundations and value-based decision making when considering partnering with foundations for youth leaders. The recommendations put forth are therefore intended to offer solutions that are within the bounds established by both groups. We also recognize that these recommendations may have application for other groups who wish to work with foundations, including organizations led by people of color.

## Recommendations for Foundations

### **RECOMMENDATION #1: CONDUCT A SCAN OF INTERNAL POLICIES, PROCESSES, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES AND CULTURE TO IDENTIFY BARRIERS THAT CAN BE ELIMINATED OR REDUCED IN ORDER TO SUPPORT YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS BETTER.**

Foundations, particularly those that have been around for more than a decade, have developed a preferred way of doing business that complies with federal IRS rules but also reflects the personalities, priorities and preferences of their leaders. Once established, it can be hard for a foundation to “see” the way it operates from a grantee’s point of view. A foundation can also fall into the mindset that it is incumbent upon the potential grantee to figure out how to work with it, not the other way around. The preliminary findings of the SYL Project reveal that many foundations did not have youth leaders and their often non-traditional approaches in mind when they developed their operations. This was certainly true for OSI-Baltimore, as we did not fully recognize some of our own internal barriers to supporting youth-led movements until we first attempted to get funding quickly to the youth-led groups leading policing reform efforts following the 2015 Uprising.

Foundations that sincerely desire to work with youth-led organizations—or that are at least open to the idea of working with youth-led organizations—should make an intentional effort to step back and see themselves from youth leaders’ perspectives. Having done that, foundations should reform those internal policies, processes, practices and even cultural norms that prevent them from effectively engaging with youth leaders. The SYL Project is OSI-Baltimore’s method to conduct this inquiry for ourselves, and we invite other foundations to use this report and other SYL Project outcomes for their own purposes. Where this report and the larger Project do not adequately address certain foundations’ needs and structures, we encourage those foundations to pursue their own inquiries and share the results so that we, in philanthropy, can improve our relationships with and support for youth-led organizations.



**RECOMMENDATION #2: INCLUDE IN THE RECOMMENDED SCAN AN EXAMINATION OF HOW RACIAL BIAS OPERATES WITHOUT AND WITHIN THE FOUNDATION, AND IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO BRING ABOUT RACIAL EQUITY IN THE FOUNDATION'S GRANT MAKING PROCESSES AND DECISION-MAKING.**

Youth leaders and program officers often noted how racism manifests in grant making processes. For example, when foundation staff talk about organizations that “lack capacity,” they are often referencing organizations led by people of color, although not explicitly. The impact of this racial bias is compounded by the fact that most youth-led organizations in Baltimore are also led by people of color. To counter racial bias in grant making, foundations must first acknowledge that they are not immune to the structural racism that plays out every day in institutions throughout the United States. Foundations must also acknowledge that even the best-intentioned people carry implicit biases, and foundation staff are not exempt. As a next step, foundations should mandate anti-racism, cultural competency, and racial equity training for all foundation board members and staff. Foundations should also engage specialists to help them review their values and priorities and identify where those values and priorities as well as practices and culture perpetuate racial bias. This kind of internal work is not easy, and requires a commitment by the foundation over the long term. It holds the potential, however, to accelerate the pace at which the foundation identifies the right partners to accomplish the right goals for the benefit of communities.

**RECOMMENDATION #3: EXPLICITLY COMMUNICATE TO PROGRAM OFFICERS THAT THE FOUNDATION IS OPEN TO SUPPORTING YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS AND WORK OPENLY WITH PROGRAM OFFICERS TO IDENTIFY THE BEST WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS.**

As noted in the findings, some program officers who currently recommend support to youth-led organizations are only able to do so by working around foundation policies and practices. This is not an ideal situation, and could have unintended consequences for the grantee, the program officer, and the foundation. Program officers are the face of a foundation to the community and are in the best position to help a foundation understand the barriers that exists to funding youth-led organizations. By the same token, foundation executives, particularly legal counsel, are in the best position to articulate whether a proposed policy or practice complies with the both the letter and the spirit of federal and state laws. Thus, it is to everyone's benefit for foundations to invite its program officers to be open about their desire to fund youth-led organizations, and then work hand-in-hand with program officers to revise foundation policies and practices without running afoul of any legal requirements. Foundations should also help their program officers communicate legal constraints to potential grantees in a way that facilitates relationship-building and invites constructive and open problem-solving.

In addition, program officers who fund youth leaders should help create a feedback loop that continually makes the strategic case for investing in youth and emerging leaders to foundation colleagues. This can include collecting data that documents the effectiveness of youth-led organizations in achieving goals that align with the foundation's mission. The program officer can then use the data to engage in intentional dialogue with foundation executives and peers about the benefits of investing in youth-led organizations. This can help ensure that a foundation's support for youth-led organizations does not live in a single program officer but is institutionalized, continuing even after a particular program officer leaves the foundation. These data can also influence other foundations to support youth-led organizations.

**RECOMMENDATION #4: EXPLORE PARTICIPATORY GRANT MAKING AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT CAN FURTHER HELP BREAK DOWN BARRIERS BETWEEN THE FOUNDATION AND YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS.**

Participatory grant making is a still-developing approach in philanthropy. Whereas traditional grant making vests the decision making authority solely in a foundation's staff or board, participatory grant making engages potential grantees and the constituencies that will be most affected by the investment in the grant making process, allowing them to help decide who receives funding and for what purpose.<sup>6</sup> Participatory grant making can take the form of proposal review panels or working groups to design an intervention from conception to execution, among other things. Participatory grant making can lead to a better understanding of the structural barriers to bringing about change, increased accountability of the foundation and the grantee to the target population, leadership development among grantees and constituents, and a balancing of the power dynamics that exist between foundations and grantees.

As applied to youth-led organizations, participatory grant making can help dispel the myths and stereotypes that foundations and youth leaders have about each other, while also giving both parties a greater opportunity to maximize their respective roles in the relationship. Through participatory grant making, youth leaders and constituents are able to contribute their empirical understanding of the problems and propose solutions, thereby increasing the diversity of the individuals making funding decision. Foundations are also able to introduce potential grantees and communities to additional resources and evidence-based practices that they have not considered but could improve upon the good work that is already happening. In the end, participatory grant making can help legitimize funding decisions and increase the credibility of youth leaders with foundations and of foundations with the community.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.grantcraft.org/blog/why-every-funder-should-consider-participatory-grantmaking>.

**RECOMMENDATION #5: CONCEIVE OF CAPACITY-BUILDING GRANTS, TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AS TOOLS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS, TO INTRODUCE YOUTH LEADERS TO PHILANTHROPY, AND TO REDUCE RACIAL BIAS IN GRANT MAKING.**

Youth leaders prize capacity-building opportunities from foundations and don't see them as a sign of distrust. One youth leader said s/he and the communities in which s/he operates have not been exposed to philanthropy and grant making. As a result, some youth leaders eschew opportunities to engage with philanthropy altogether, and others engage with trepidation and, often, a host of assumptions.

The focus groups affirmed that youth leaders want to learn about philanthropy. In addition, they want to understand the nuts and bolts of different corporate and organizational structures and how each of those structures impacts their potential to raise necessary funds. Youth leaders want to learn how to identify appropriate philanthropic partners, write proposals, develop strategic plans, and collect data in ways that feel true to what they are trying to accomplish. They also want to understand how to do succession planning so that the work continues even if they move on to other platforms.

Foundations can provide this education through capacity-building grants as well as trainings and technical assistance. When used appropriately, capacity-building grants, training and technical assistance can provide opportunities for foundations and youth leaders to get to know each other. Training and technical assistance can acknowledge the structural racism as well as the cultural differences that have produced underdeveloped and under-resourced organizations. And, capacity building grants can help youth-led organizations gain the stability needed to sustain their efforts over the long term.

As requested by youth leaders, training and technical assistance should not only be provided in foundation offices during regular business hours but also in the communities that have had little exposure to philanthropy and at times that are convenient for community members. In addition, foundations should be clear about their goals and rationale for supporting capacity building and, ideally, should seek to help youth leaders grow in areas where the youth leaders desire to grow. This level of transparency will help youth leaders trust foundations' intentions. It may also help to alleviate some program officers' hesitancy to fund capacity building for youth-led organizations for fear that doing so will reinforce negative biases about youths' capabilities.

**RECOMMENDATION #6: IMPLEMENT MULTI-YEAR FUNDING FOR YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS.**

Youth leaders expressed frustration with foundation processes that they found burdensome as well as foundation concerns about their organizations' sustainability.

Multi-year funding addresses both issues, decreasing the number of times youth leaders are required to interface with administrative processes that all parties acknowledge can be burdensome and giving youth leaders more time to develop their organizations and do the work.

Rather than looking at quantitative criteria to make a funding decision, one youth leader suggested that foundations prioritize two criteria when making funding decisions and assessing an applicant's performance: 1) whether the applicant has already been conducting work in the issue area and/or community for which they seek funding; and 2) whether the applicant has a staff, board and constituency that is directly affected by the issue it desires to address. To this youth leader, use of these two criteria would signify that the foundation values the applicant's authority and knowledge about the issue.

**RECOMMENDATION #7: WHEN HIRING STAFF, ESPECIALLY STAFF WHO WILL WORK AS PART OF A PLACE-BASED TEAM, RECRUIT FROM IMPACTED COMMUNITIES.**

Youth leaders spoke of foundations having a staff composition that does not mirror the composition of the communities where they primarily invest. And both program officers and youth leaders emphasized the need for foundations to broaden their networks of potential grantees. To address both of these concerns, foundations should look to hire more staff from local communities, using new or different venues for recruiting. For example, foundations could distribute job announcements at community organization meetings, at places located in neighborhoods where youth leaders and leaders of color tend to work (e.g., schools or service-providing organizations), and through other youth-led organizations with which they already work. Hiring individuals who are local and from affected communities will broaden foundations' networks of potential grantees and partners and will also help foundations develop a staff composition that is more reflective of the communities in which they work.

## Recommendations for Youth-Led Organizations

**RECOMMENDATION #1: BECOME EDUCATED ABOUT THE ECOSYSTEM IN WHICH PHILANTHROPIC INSTITUTIONS OPERATE, INCLUDING LEGAL CONSTRAINTS, TO UNDERSTAND THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS.**

Many of the criticisms that youth leaders have of philanthropy are valid and warrant consideration and action. The focus groups, however, also revealed that youth leaders lack an awareness of the legal requirements and constraints that affect all foundations, regardless of their structure and mission.

For example, in order to maintain their tax-exempt status, foundations are required by federal law to obtain full reports from grantee organizations on how any project funds are spent. How this information is reported is up to the foundation, and this is where

foundations can make their procedures more flexible or helpful. Foundations, however, cannot eliminate the grant reporting requirement altogether. In addition, foundations organized as 501(c) (3) tax-exempt organizations are prohibited from engaging in or supporting any political activity that favors one candidate over another or appears to be partisan. Further, foundations may not support voter registration unless they do so in five states and over two voting cycles.

These and other rules constrain foundations to operate in a certain way, which informs foundations' policies, practices and even culture. To work better with foundations and advocate for the removal of barriers that impede access to them, it behooves youth-led organizations to understand the regulations that constrain foundations and distinguish between constraints and discretionary practices.

**RECOMMENDATION #2: USE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS, TEACH-INS AND PEER-TO-PEER COACHING TO HELP IMPROVE ONE'S OWN PROSPECTS OR THE PROSPECTS OF A YOUTH-LED ALLY TO RECEIVE FOUNDATION FUNDING.**

Despite barriers, the focus groups participants included youth leaders who had successfully applied for and received foundation funding. The format of the focus groups offered some opportunity for youth leaders to probe one another's experiences. Additional peer-to-peer exchanges, particularly for leaders that did not participate in a focus group, may prove useful for organizations that have not been successful at receiving funding or who have eschewed seeking funding from foundations for their own reasons. Organizations that have received funding can share insights and lessons learned, and may be able to guide other youth-led organizations through a particular foundation's grant making process.

In addition, youth-led organizations that desire to receive foundation funding should reach out to program officers who support youth-led organizations and interview them about their program goals, how they work, and what they like to see in a grantee. To be clear, the purpose of the interview is not for the youth leader to learn how to contort his/her organization to fit a foundation's priorities. Rather, the purpose of the interview is to gain insights into philanthropy and effective fundraising that a youth leader would be unlikely to gain on his/her own. These interviews can be conducted with a program officer who works for the foundation program the youth leader wants to target or with a program officer who works on a different issue but, nonetheless, can explain how foundations work.

**RECOMMENDATION #3: RESPECTFULLY AND AUTHENTICALLY PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO PROGRAM OFFICERS WHEN A REQUEST FOR FUNDING IS DENIED OR WHEN THE RELATIONSHIP FEELS LIKE IT IS PRODUCING AS MUCH HARM AS GOOD.**

Too often, organizations that are denied funding fail to ask why. Rather, they immediately make assumptions about why they were not funded. They then repeat those assumptions

to others, which gives others a negative impression of the foundation and/or discourages others from seeking funding. Worse still, they repeatedly make the mistake that contributed to the reason they were denied funding the first time, leading to a negative cycle of more denials and more frustration. Even when a youth-led organization receives funding, it can sometimes feel like the money is not worth the effort. There is a power dynamic between program officers and grantees, and less-informed or enlightened program officers may exploit this dynamic in ways that make applicants or grantees feel that they cannot express themselves without putting their funding at risk.

It is imperative that youth-led organizations understand that their relationship with a funder rises and falls on the same principle that fuels all other healthy relationships – open and honest communication and accountability. If an application is declined, the youth leader should reach out to the program officer to ask why. As with all healthy dialogues, the youth leader should use an approach that is respectful and authentic, approaching the conversation as a learning experience as opposed to a confrontation.

Where a funding relationship already exists, youth leaders should take steps to point out and challenge the power dynamic when it shows up in negative ways, just as foundation staff need to take steps to balance the power dynamic between themselves and grantees. The optimal grant maker-grantee relationship is one in which each values and trusts the other – a relationship that is only achieved through open dialogue and mutual accountability.