



COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR YOUTH AN AGENDA FOR PROGRESS THROUGH CREATIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The Need

Too many young people are disconnected from their communities and lack the means to make successful transitions to adulthood.¹ They also face rapidly changing economic, social, technological, and environmental challenges that call for innovative solutions. Given opportunities to develop their creative potential, young people will live richer, fuller lives and develop the critical learning and life skills they need to become active contributors to their communities.

The Opportunity: Creative Youth Development

Out-of-school time and community-based programs in the arts, humanities, and sciences are untapped national assets with great potential to connect youth to their communities. Expanding the reach and impact of the creative youth development sector should be a national priority.

Creative youth development programs link individual growth with the emergence of social responsibility. As young people create their own work in the arts, humanities, and sciences, they build the personal, social, and intellectual capacities they need to succeed in school, career, and life. And as they experience the creative process over an extended period, they learn that they can use it to express their own identities, understand and change the world around them, and connect to the greater human experience.

Across the country, hundreds of creative youth development programs are setting high expectations for young people, encouraging positive risk taking, promoting leadership development, fostering relationships with adult mentors and peers, and offering real-world opportunities to contribute to social change.

National Summit on Creative Youth Development

To capitalize on the work of creative youth development programs nationwide and the impact they have on students, families, and communities, more than 200 leaders, funders, policymakers, researchers, and youth gathered in Boston for the National Summit on Creative Youth Development, March 27–29, 2014. The summit was presented by the Massachusetts Cultural Council in partnership with the National Guild for Community Arts Education and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

The delegates' work was informed by a [national research study](#) that included in-depth interviews with a range of practitioners and policymakers in related fields, focus groups with youth, and a national survey of practitioners and young people from more than 150 creative youth development programs.

The overriding focus of the gathering was collective action: capitalizing on strong partnerships and focused advocacy to effect large-scale change on complex social issues. The summit produced the following agenda to implement at the local, state, and national levels.

¹ The White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012: *Final Report: Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth*. Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service.

Policy and Advocacy Agenda

Position creative youth development as the catalyst for dynamic cross-sector collaborations to ensure young people's academic, professional, and personal success.

- Build organizational readiness for collaboration toward shared youth development outcomes.
- Invest in structures and strategies that facilitate collective action to support youth and their successful transitions into careers, college, and adult life.

Establish young people and their creative youth development programs as key leaders in discovering and developing opportunities to improve the livability and economic viability of their communities.

- Connect creative youth development programs with local community development initiatives to improve community outcomes.
- Amplify youth voices and strengthen their roles as key decision makers in community development initiatives.

Develop and deepen opportunities for young people to create a more just and equitable society.

- Collaborate with youth to integrate their voices and leadership into the core structures and practices of creative youth development programs and the broader sector.
- Champion creative youth development programs as spaces in which young people develop positive self-identities, recognize liberating and oppressive forces, and activate these programs' potential for impact.

Document and boldly communicate the vital impact and experience of creative youth development.

- Invest in capturing and analyzing impact through shared language, systems, and tools.
- Demonstrate impact in order to cultivate shared ownership of creative youth development across sectors.

Support and advocate for a strong creative youth development sector with effective business models, new revenue sources, and partnerships that generate adequate funding and sustain the sector.

- Organize and mobilize as a sector to increase capacity, sustainability, and impact.
- Advocate for and develop funding strategies to increase the strength and long-term impact of creative youth development programs.