The Psychology and Practice of Youth-Adult Partnership:

Bridging Generations for Youth Development and Community Change

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Abstract

Youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) has become a phenomenon of interest to scholars, policy makers, and community practitioners. Despite the potential of Y-AP to promote positive youth development, increase civic engagement, and strengthen community settings, the practice remains unfamiliar to many. Although research has increased over the past decade, the construct remains vague with an insufficient grounding in developmental theory and community practice. This article seeks to help fill these gaps. To do so, we synthesize data and insights from the historical foundations of YAP, community based research, and case study. This analysis allows us to propose YAP as a unifying concept, distinct from other forms of youth-adult relationships, with four core elements: authentic decision making, natural mentors, reciprocity, and community connectedness. We further propose that Y-AP functions as a significant active ingredient for youth and civic development, while concurrently creating the conditions for organizational improvement and community change. More research is needed to test these conclusions and some key directions are offered. At the same time, we believe that enough is known for productive action. Directions for informing policy and strengthening practice are highlighted.

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Relationships and social transactions among young people and adults in community

settings have become a focus of research and practice (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007; Seidman,

2011; Wong, Zimmerman & Porter, 2010; Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011; Zeldin, Petrokubi &

MacNeil, 2008). A growing body of research on youth civic development indicates that when

youth take on leadership roles within organizations and communities – through initiatives such

as youth in governance, youth organizing, youth activism, youth media, and youth as researchers

– youth development is enhanced and civic engagement is promoted (Christens & Peterson,

2012; Flanagan & Faison, 2001; McLellan & Youniss, 2003; Sullivan & Larson, 2010).

Within the context of youth civic development, youth-adult-partnership (Y-AP) has

become a phenomenon of particular interest. Conceptualized as both a developmental process

and as a community practice, Y-AP involves citizens across generations working together to

address common concerns. Grounded in the frame of 'free spaces' (Evans & Boyte, 1992), Y-

AP emphasizes that healthy communities and organizations are dependent on the voluntary

contributions of its members. All individuals are needed and deserve support in finding their

proper role, regardless of age. At their best, Y-AP emphasizes mutuality and respect among

youth and adults, with a goal-oriented focus on shared leading and learning (Camino, 2000).

Youth and adults are challenged to bring their own perspectives, experiences, and networks into

the partnership. By doing so, they can potentially promote community change by stimulating

critical discourse, skill development, participatory inquiry, and collective action (Linds, Goulet

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& Sammel, 2010; Libby, Rosen, and Sedonaen, 2005; Prilleltensky, 1989).

Wong et al (2010) offer a typology of youth-adult relationships. From their synthesis of the literature, they conclude that the pluralistic form of Y-AP is most optimal. This is because the "shared control between youth and adults provides a social arrangement that may be ideal for both empowering youth and community development" (p.109). From a developmental perspective, Li and Julian (2012) and Hamilton and Hamilton (2006) emphasize that, especially for teenagers, "prescriptive" mentoring relationships, defined as those where adults maintain a high degree of control, fail to engage youth and often lead to tension and discontent. These authors conclude that "developmental relationships", characterized by a balance of power among adults and youth, are most likely to promote youth development.

But it is not only youth who benefit from these relationships. Under certain conditions, youth contributions to organizations and communities may also promote adult and staff development, in addition to strengthening local institutions, policies and programs (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Siesma, 2006; Mitra, 2009; Sherrod, Torney-Purta & Flanagan, 2010; Youniss & Levine, 2009; Zeldin, 2004). It is for these reasons that Y-AP has become increasing salient in recommendations to strengthen philanthropy (Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth, 2002), local governance (National League of Cities, 2010), nonprofit management (Kunreuther, Kim & Rodriguez, 2009), social justice campaigns (Linds et al, 2010), and school reform efforts (Framework for Success for All Students, 2006).

Despite the potential for Y-AP to promote positive youth development, increase civic engagement, and strengthen community settings, there remain barriers to theory building, research, and practice. Even with its relatively rich history, Y-AP remains unfamiliar to many.

Conceptual challenges and inconsistencies in construct definition have limited efforts to synthesize extant scholarship. Although research has increased over the past decade, there is an insufficient understanding of the core elements that underlie effective youth-adult partnerships (Wong et al., 2010; Zeldin, Larson, Camino, and O'Conner, 2005).

The purpose of this article is to help fill those gaps. We begin by tracing the ways that Y-AP has become a phenomenon of interest to policy makers, practitioners, and scholars over the past 40 years. From this review, Y-AP emerges as a focal, cross-cutting construct that operates as an active ingredient for positive youth and civic development. The review also allows us to define the construct in a way that is consistent with recent research and field-based conceptualizations of best practice. Finally, we bring together the perspectives of community practitioners and researchers to explore the core elements of Y-AP. Two brief case examples of Y-AP in community-based organizations are presented to illustrate these core elements.

Foundations of Youth-Adult Partnership

Historical Perspectives

Citizen voice is a cornerstone of democracy. However, arenas of civic life -- participation on public advisory groups, nonprofit boards, community organizing, neighborhood action groups, nonprofit boards -- are typically characterized by age segregation. This context contributes to spatial isolation among generations, a lack of understanding or distrust among the younger and older members of communities, and a delay in the assumption of "adult" responsibilities by young people (Hine, 1999; Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002; White & Wyn 1998; Zeldin et al., 2003). Age segregation across all arenas of community life has long

been identified and questioned. Hollingshead (1949), for example, observed that within the sociology of communities, adults perceive a need to "segregate children from the real world" and to "keep the maturing child ignorant of [this] world of conflict and contradiction" (p. 149). Twenty-five years later, the President's Science Advisory Committee (1974) offered a similar perspective:

> "Professionalism and bureaucratization have sharply narrowed the range of youth's contacts with adults outside of leisure. The forces that have isolated young people and cut off certain options once available to them have not, thus, been necessarily mean or reactionary. Paradoxically, they have been, at least in original intent, enlightened and altruistic... What was once done to protect youth from manifest exploitation, now serves to reinforce the `outsider' status of youth, to the point where they deprive youth of experience important to their growth and development." [p.130].

The National Commission on Resources for Youth (1974) brought this perspective to policy by stating that youth and adults can, indeed should, work together on concerns that matter. In so doing, this Commission identified criteria that continue to be salient in research and practice. The Commission defined inter-generational partnerships as those which emphasize:

> "... planning and/or decision-making affecting others, in an activity whose impact or consequence extends to others, i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves. There is mutuality in teaching and learning, where each age group [youth and adults] sees themselves as a resource for the other and offers what it uniquely can provide." [p.25]

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This Commission was the first, in contemporary times, to identify Y-AP as integral to both youth development and civic engagement. These ideas, in turn, were expanded by the National Task Force on Citizen Education (1977). After synthesizing research and expert testimony, this Task Force highlighted that youth participation in decision-making was an influential strategy for increasing knowledge about civics and politics, promoting a personal sense of efficacy, and encouraging later involvement in democratic action. It recommended that Y-AP be a central design element for community programs and institutions, including public schools.

Viewing young people as community resources mirrored the historical moment. Kenneth Keniston (1971), for example, in explaining the causes of youth activism during the 1960s, emphasized societal rejection resulting from inherent tensions between the next generation and normative standards. The Commissions were not simply a product of the times, however. Each was backed by an extensive review of developmental theory and empirical research. Building from the theoretical work of Dewey (1938), Coleman (1961) Erickson (1968) and others, the Commissions saw the antecedents of youth contribution and activism not simply as a reaction to society, but more fundamentally, as a developmental search for identity, connection, and meaning.

With hindsight, the 1970's were the zenith of Y-AP as a cornerstone of youth policy. Labeled as 'experiential civic learning' when implemented in communities and as 'education for citizen action' when offered within schools, the practice became embedded within settings across the country (Hamilton, 1980; Newman, 1975). Subsequent growth, however, has been uneven. In the 1980's, a burst of reports were generated that questioned the scholarship and policy

recommendations of the previous decade. Exemplified by *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), these reports were a response to the fears of foreign competition and declining academic standards. Rather than providing opportunities for structured learning through contribution, this Commission recommended that students spend more time in the classroom with more conventional instruction and testing of basic skills. These assertions closely paralleled the approach to the War on Drugs which sought to inoculate youth from substance abuse through helping them gain the knowledge and resistance skills to 'just say no' to risky situations (Humphreys & Rappaport, 1993). The idea of youth and adults as partners developing solutions to social problems and working together to build community was eclipsed. Similar policies remain in force today. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, for example, as well as the Bush administration's 2004 decision that requires after-school funds to be used solely for academic enrichment, have further diminished mainstream policy support for experientially-based civic education and for the practice of youth and adult partnership (Levin, 2007).

The primary exception to this policy trend is the Corporation for National and Community Service (the Corporation). Authorized by Congress in 1993, the Corporation was created to promote voluntary service to community, while concurrently, earning credits for higher education. Programmatically, the Corporation seeks to connect youth development with community change. Its national service goals are: (1) to provide opportunities for young people to build character and a civic ethic, (2) make significant contributions to community, and (3) promote social justice by reducing local divides emanating from race, class, and age. Given that these goals are "*contingent on each other*" (italics in original) (Waldman, 1995, p.28), the Corporation has created incentives for organizations to bring together youth, young adults,

adults, and elders in collective work to strengthen community capacity. The Corporation has

been directly responsible for sustaining and supporting a myriad of innovative organizations –

AmeriCorps, City Year, Teach for America, KaBoom!, Habitat for Humanity, Foster

Grandparents, Public Allies, YouthBuild – that illustrate the range and diversity of

intergenerational partnerships (Waldman, 1995). Although these efforts have achieved bipartisan

support during the Clinton and Bush administrations (Sagawa & Halperin, 2003), funding

stability remains elusive. In February 2011, for example, House Republicans voted to eliminate

the Corporation, and to reject President Obama's budget request for $1.4 billion in federal funds.

Building a Community Infrastructure

In spite of this federal climate, a community infrastructure of support for youth

participation is being created. Private foundations, most notably the W. K. Kellogg, Surdna, and

National 4-H Foundations, complemented the efforts of the Corporation by launching national

demonstration projects. Initiated during the 1990's, these projects focused on creating new roles

for youth within community organizations under rubrics such as youth as philanthropists, youth

in governance, youth organizing, youth as evaluators, and youth citizenry. All of the projects

required the integration of youth into key forums of decision making. Some invited youth onto

boards of directors and other governance committees; others actively recruited their involvement

in program planning, implementation, training, and evaluation (O'Donoghue, Kirshner &

McLaughlin, 2002; Zeldin, et al., 2000).

As part of these foundation-driven demonstration projects, scholars and practitioners

collaborated in the development of curricula and training programs, often around the emerging

umbrella phrase of "youth-adult partnership". A sampling includes: *Youth-adult partnerships: A*

training manual (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003); *Building*

effective youth-adult partnerships (Advocates for Youth, 2001); *Creating youth-adult*

partnerships (National 4-H Council, 1997), *A guide to successful youth-adult partnerships*

(Texas Network of Youth Services, 2002) and *Successfully involving youth in decision making*

(Young & Sazama, 1999). These resources have served multiple purposes. Not only did they

bring consistency to the practice, highlighting its central idea of engaging youth and adults in

shared work and purpose, but they also brought public legitimacy to the effort.

As Y-AP became more visible, youth were increasingly invited into community-wide

efforts. Young people became members of interagency advisory boards, prevention councils,

nonprofit boards of directors, school boards, and community foundations (Camino, 2000;

Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth, 2002). Indeed, in a few cities, such as Hampton

(VA), San Francisco, and Austin, there is an explicit expectation, supported by mandates, that

youth will be involved in policy making and fund allocation (Sirianni, 2005; Zeldin, Petrokubi

and Camino, 2008). This trend appears to continue. In 2006, Portland (OR), for example,

created a Youth Commission that reports directly to the mayor and the county council. Close to

twenty administrative departments involve youth in policy making and evaluation (Frank &

Dominguez, 2007). An inquiry by The National League of Cities (2009) identified five

"established trends" among municipalities: (1) forming a youth council, (2) appointing youth to

municipal boards and commissions, (3) hosting a youth summit, (4) conducting community

assessments, and (5) promoting youth service. The authors also found four "emerging

innovations": (1) using new media to engage young people, (2) adopting a bill of rights for

children and youth, (3) developing initiatives to encourage youth to vote, and (4) putting youth in

charge of developing teen centers and skate parks.

Perspectives from Contemporary Scholarship

Scholars have responded to the trends in practice by examining youth participation in a range of community settings. Much of the contemporary theory and research has been assembled in special issues of journals and other edited volumes. The names of the issues underscore the salience of youth participation to a broad array of disciplines and fields: *Youth participation in communities and institutions* (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002), *Growing into citizenship* (Sherrod, Flanagan & Youniss, 2002), *Youth-adult relationships in community programs* (Zeldin, Larson & Camino, 2005), *Youth as important civic actors* (Kim & Sherman, 2006), *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change* (Ginwright, Noguera & Cammorota, 2006), *Youth activism as a context for learning and development* (Kirshner, 2007), *Emancipatory practices: Adult/youth engagement for social and environmental justice* (Linds, Goutlet and Sammel, 2010), and *Youth civic development* (Flanagan & Christens, 2011).

Despite the diverse disciplines and purposes underlying this collection of work, our review indicates that they share at least three significant perspectives. Foremost, there is a strong consensus that youth participation is best framed as a collective construct. Kirshner (2007, p.370) observes, for example, that "much of the literature about youth activism foregrounds the accomplishments of youth themselves. But this emphasis on youth obscures the fact that activism groups typically embody cross-age collaborations..." Indeed, it is under the conditions of shared work, shared norms and common values that youth become motivated to be involved (Sherrod et al., 2002). Zeldin and colleagues (2005) similarly conclude that it is the quality of cross-age relationships within ongoing youth and adult groups, not simply the act of community

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participation, which contributes to positive youth outcomes. In brief, the focus on adult

relationships adds a level of complexity to the simple conceptualization of youth participation,

but it also adds a strong element of construct validity.

A second theme revolves around issues of power and social justice. Ginwright and

colleagues (2006) explicitly stress that youth participation should be conceptualized in

relationship to specific economic and social conditions as well as a collective response to the

social marginalization of young people. In reviewing field-based studies on effective citizenry,

Kim and Sherman (2006) observe that social movements in the United States have typically not

been age inclusive. They claim that isolation and extreme power imbalances have contributed to

a deep generation gap among social justice leaders. The proper response, according to Linds and

colleagues' (2010) is a greater emphasis on emancipatory relationships "that involve a

commitment to understanding systemic change, and barriers to it. Along with this understanding,

to be effective in their struggle, youth and adults alike must learn how to participate together in

the processes of change" (p. xvi). For these reasons, Flanagan and Christens (2011) urge more

scholarship on systematic injustices inherent within societal structures, values, and community.

The third theme involves the processes and outcomes of strong youth-adult partnerships.

Looking across the volumes there is a strong consensus that joint work, common values, shared

power, and a focus on collective issues contribute significantly to positive outcomes. As youth

participate in organizational and community life, with adults as their collaborators, they begin to

see themselves as powerful civic actors. These experiences can make potent contributions to

many aspects of positive youth and civic development including empowerment, critical

consciousness, personal and social well-being, initiative and purpose. Participation of this nature

has been found to predict adult civic engagement, in addition to creating contexts that lead to the strengthening of organizations and communities (Flanagan & Christens, 2011; Zeldin, et al, 2005; Sherrod et al., 2002).

Conceptualizing Youth-Adult Partnership

A strong foundation and justification for youth-adult partnership has been established over the past 40 years. The fact that this evidence emanates from diverse academic disciplines, as well as from practitioners and policy makers, offers further endorsement for its centrality in youth development. So, why has progress been so uneven and slow? Most importantly, and as noted in all of the previously cited special issues, norms and structures do not readily exist in the United States to mobilize the potential of youth. Consequently, the notion that youth are citizens who can contribute to civic life, in ways similar and complementary to adult involvement, has yet to become a public idea.

Cutler and Taylor's (2003, p. 6) pithy observation is also insightful: "The straightforward act of youth and adults working together is often bedeviled by misunderstandings over seemingly obvious words." Consider, for example, the commonly used phrases of "youth participation" and "youth engagement." Such terms may not adequately reflect the collective nature of community action or the significant involvement of adults in such action. Moreover, these phrases may create some degree of confusion because of their associations with constructs and measures in the psychological literature. Participation is usually measured through indicators such as intensity, duration, breadth, and exposure. Engagement is typically conceptualized as an element of participation, and is measured through concepts such as personal effort, interest, and other

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aspects of subjective experience (Fredricks, et al., 2004). Community practitioners often use terms such as "youth-directed" and "youth led" and contrast this orientation with "adult-directed" (Larson, Walker, and Pierce, 2005). This distinction can be valuable for orienting practice at a most general level. But the paradigms do not accurately portray the balancing of youth and adult power and contributions that underlie developmental relationships (Li and Julian, 2012) which change over time and task (Camino, 2005; Wong et al., 2010).

It is also necessary to struggle with the age-related concept of "youth". In this article we use the word youth rather than "adolescence" because it is most consistent with the language of practitioners (e.g., youth-adult partnership, youth voice, youth researchers, youth in governance) in the United States. By youth, we mean young people under the age of 18. This decision is consistent with the populations most often studied through research, and recognizes that this age group faces unique legal, institutional and cultural barriers to participation (United Nations Rights of the Child, 1989). That said, the issue of age will always be contested. In many settings, for example, young people are given the choice of identifying as a "youth" or "young adult," thus allowing them to self-select into an age-prescribed programmatic role. Additionally, the age range of youth extends to 35 years in many countries, especially in those regions where unemployment is extraordinarily high and transitions to adulthood are especially tenuous (World Urban Forum, 2006). Our impression is that the age range of youth is also broadening upwards in the United States for similar reasons.

A Working Definition of Y-AP

We believe that scholarship has reached a level of maturity that allows the field to operationalize Y-AP with stronger conceptual rigor and community applicability. Grounded in

the main themes emanating from the historical, community, and empirical foundations of Y-AP, we offer this working definition: *Youth-adult partnership is the practice of: (a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or to affirmatively address a community issue.*

This working definition has certain strengths. It integrates the critical features of interpersonal interactions, specifically role, relationship, and activity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), while integrating cross-disciplinary scholarship, specifically from human development, community psychology, and civic engagement. We believe that it also has the potential to provide a consistent lens through which to empirically analyze settings and the developmental quality of adolescents' experiences in a variety of community contexts – from youth groups, to community organizing, to volunteering, to coalitions – while concurrently providing touchstones for organizational and community action.

Our working definition also provides a conceptual foundation from which to differentiate Y-AP from other types of youth-adult interactions. Perhaps the most salient differentiating feature is that Y-AP focuses on *multiple youth working with multiple adults.* We seek to emphasize that Y-AP is not one adult interacting with one youth, which is the traditional mentor or apprenticeship model (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006; Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Rather, the essence of Y-AP is found in the dynamics of group interaction, with young people developing multiple relationships – some deep and some cursory – with a variety of adults. Similarly, the emphasis on "collective, democratic action" and "shared work" underscores that the *assignment of roles and division of labor is not determined by age, but instead, is based on the specific*

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motivation, skill, and network that each individual brings to the endeavor. Unlike apprenticeship, for example, where adults retain accountability due to position and professional skill set (Halpern, 2005), Y-AP builds from the specific assets that participating adults and youth bring to the table. Shared work – including collective deliberation, planning, action, and reflection – is fundamental to Y-AP. It is through these processes that diverse groups can construct the shared meaning and intention that underlie democratic efforts and civil society (Camino, 2005; Hess, 2009; Kirshner, 2009).

The intent of Y-AP is to "promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue." Y-APs often take place within efforts to explicitly change unjust systems by confronting root causes of inequality (Christens & Zeldin, 2011; Prilleltensky, 2010). In contrast with service learning, for example, in which individual-level learning objectives, rather than collective objectives and joint work, are often the driving design feature (Knapp et al., 2010; Morton, 1995; Nokes et al., 2005), Y-AP sets its goals based primarily on organizational and community needs. Projects and activities are ultimately selected and designed on the potential for positively influencing community well being. In the spirit of Dewey and the experiential education movement, the expectation is that youth (as well as their adult partners) will garner the most significant developmental and education benefits through democratic action on issues that matter deeply to both parties. *Y-APs are designed, therefore, with an eye toward local problems and social justice. In this way, they create contexts that actively support youth in being agents in their own development, and choosing their own objectives and commitments.*

The remaining parameter of the working definition is that Y-AP occurs "over a sustained

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period of time." *Y-APs are not bound by semester, season, or project.* Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Y-AP is that their duration is often open-ended. Consistent with the flow of organizational and community change, one activity begins, another then takes priority, and another is put on the "slow track." There is an expectation that youth remain involved for a certain task or responsibility, but that overtime, some participants will cycle in and out depending on time availability and interest. Others will take on new roles, with progressively more challenge and responsibility, within the ongoing organizational initiative or community campaign (Libby et al., 2005; Zeldin, Petrokubi & Camino, 2008)

The Core Elements of Y-AP

Based on our review of the literatures of research and practice, our working hypothesis is that positive youth and civic development is best promoted when youth-adult partnerships are endemic to community and organizational settings. Stated another way, we claim that Y-AP is a social regularity (Seidman, 1988) – a specific constellation of activity, role and relationship – that underlies development. It is an "active ingredient" (Li and Julian, 2012, p. 157) that manifests its significant influence at the "point of contact" (Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010) between youth and adults within community settings. We believe there is broad support for this claim from historical, community, and empirical perspectives.

But what are the core elements of Y-AP? Our working definition, derived from inquiries on youth-adult interactions provides an initial view. That which makes Y-AP a significant developmental influence on young people, and differentiates it from other forms of youth-adult interactions, is its emphasis on youth-adult groups, working democratically over a sustained

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period of time, on issues of concern to both the younger and the older participants. These parameters are consistent with and broadly validated by developmental theory. Consider, for example, the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) who in describing how human development is enhanced speaks to the importance of ongoing interactions characterized by "reciprocal activity" and the shifting of power "in favor of the developing person" (pg. 60). Sprinthall (1994) emphasizes role-taking experiences in challenging relational contexts that are balanced with opportunities for reflection and adult support. From a community psychology perspective, Maton and Salem (1995) find that individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment when they participate in "empowering settings" that are characterized by a system of shared beliefs, a climate of emotional support, opportunities to take on diverse roles and responsibilities, and leadership that is committed to individual and community change. Similarly, research consistently identifies the importance of opportunities to exercise voice, negotiate with peers and adults, and assume responsibility for the integrity of group projects as contributors to youth civic engagement (Flanagan, 2004). In brief, Y-AP, at its best, fully encompasses the types of interactions that researchers have long demonstrated to underlie human development and psychological empowerment.

These parameters are useful but may not be entirely sufficient as guides for practice. As Camino (2000) reports in her influential study introducing the concept of Y-AP, practitioners understood that Y-APs are fundamentally a relationship based on the principle that adults should work with, rather than for, youth. As such, "the crux of the matter lay not in articulating whether youth and adults should work together, but how they should do so." (p. 14). Implied in the voices of community practitioners and youth, as documented by Camino (2000), program and

community interventions can be grounded by working definitions and classic theory, but effective implementation demands a heightened understanding and greater specificity of the core elements through which Y-AP operates (see also Wong et al., 2010). In the remainder of this article, therefore, we propose an empirically based anatomy of Y-AP's core elements. To do so, we draw on the spirit and method of Schorr and Farrow (2011) by adopting a pragmatic approach to integrating theory with evidence from multiple sources. Specifically, this integrative review relies on interdisciplinary research (e.g., human development, community psychology, education) on Y-AP, program evaluations that include Y-AP, and policy and practice literatures. This integration, as presented conceptually in Figure 1, resulted in four core elements of Y-AP: authentic decision making, natural mentors, reciprocal activity, and community connectedness.

-- Figure 1 About Here --

To situate these core elements in community practice, the following integration includes case examples from two established organizations (see Tables 1 and 2). The first organization is Austin Voices for Youth and Education (AVEY). AVEY, established in 2002, brings Austin's residents together to strengthen communities and public schools (for detail, see Zeldin, Petrokubi, & Camino, 2008). Y-AP is the guiding principle and practice at AVEY, according to organizational staff. Because both youth and adults are community members, it is important that both are included in change processes. AVEY integrates Y-AP into all of its settings. It uses Y-AP to strengthen school governance and community organizing to bring citizen voices to issues of educational reform and community capacity building.

The second organization is Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC) in San Bernardino, CA (for detail, see Christens & Dolan, 2011; Peterson, Dolan & Hanft, 2010).

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ICUC engages in community organizing through faith-based institutions, schools and neighborhoods to improve communities, with a focus on public safety, education, community infrastructure and opportunities for working-class families. For the first 15 years of its existence, ICUC was composed almost entirely of adult participants. It began implementing an intergenerational organizing model in more recent years. The activities and settings of youth and adults in ICUC span advocacy, participatory research, and collective action for social justice.

Authentic Decision Making

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is premised on the principle that youth have a right to be heard in all matters affecting them, including policy matters, and have their views taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity (Landsdown, 2001). Thus, youth voice is not only about expression, but more centrally, it is about recognition by powerful others and by inclusion in consequential deliberations. The implication for practice is that youth actively participate at the center of collective decision making (see Table 1 for examples), rather than at its margins (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Kim & Sherman, 2006; National League of Cities, 2010).

Broad empirical support underlies decision making as a core element of Y-AP. For example, the opportunities to participate in decision making and to take on leadership roles has been found to attract and retain low income and minority youth in community programs (Ginwright, 2007; Deschenes, et al, 2010). Active participation and recognized voice are consistently found to be influential processes underlying the development of agency as well as confidence to achieve one's personal goals (Elder, 1999; Evans, 2007). As youth begin to exercise agency through collective ventures, they not only strengthen their sociopolitical

awareness, but also experience gains in psychological empowerment, both of which contribute to civic and political participation (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Larson & Hansen, 2005; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Additionally, youth participation in group decision making has been found to facilitate positive youth development, specifically mastery, skill development, confidence, identity exploration, initiative, and emotional wellbeing among young people (Dworkin, Larsen, and Hansen, 2003; Larson, 2000; Mitra, 2004; Youniss, McLellan & Yates, 1997; Zeldin, 2004).

Natural Mentors

Decision making by youth occurs in contexts that are not only goal-directed but also relational and emotional. The structure of Y-AP involves youth interacting with multiple adults including community leaders, youth workers, community organizers, civil servants, and neighbors. Youth differentiate these relationships in terms of their potential to form instrumental and respectful partnerships. For example, adults who are willing to work collaboratively are referred to as "adult partners" or "allies" (Camino, 2000). In another study, the term "adults in power" was used to refer to adults who are not yet seen as partners, but who have influence or capital that young people hope to access (Christens & Dolan, 2011, p. 536). Adults perceived as disrespectful are described as "just not getting it" (Zeldin et al., 2000, p. 13).

Some evidence suggests that youth have clear ideas regarding the ideal characteristics of adult partners. Youth across New York who participated in a state study, for example, reported the desire to work with adults who are who are non-judgmental, passionate, and well organized (Goggins, Powers, Spano, 2002). In a similar study conducted in California, youth defined adult partners as those who are positive communicators, active listeners, and authentically act their age. They seek adults who can help them look to the future and are willing to connect them to

social and employment networks (Murdock, Moncloa, Subramium, 2010)). The National League of Cities (2010, p.32), on the basis of their national inquiry, found that "adult partners must be able to empower without abdicating, support without taking over, and encourage without preaching."

The expectations that youth hold for their adult partners are consistent with the developmental processes that characterize effective "natural mentoring" among youth and non-familial adults. As contrasted with "structured mentoring" where adults take the lead in creating the parameters of the adult-youth relationship, natural mentoring occurs without a defined intervention and by the mutual consent of those involved under conditions of equal power (Dubois & Silverhorn, 2005; Hamilton, et al., 2006). Situated outside the most proximal stresses facing youth, natural mentors can use their independence and perceived stability for unconditional support and professional and social networking (Rhodes, Ebert & Fischer, 1992). Natural mentors sometimes help youth focus on their future in the face of adversity (Garmezy, 1991; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010) and serve as successful professional and educational role models (Rhodes, et al., 2006; Chang, et al., 2010). Natural mentors have been found to be especially consequential for youth living in low income and other challenging environments (DuBois, et al., 2002; Werner & Smith, 1982).

From this perspective, Y-AP can be conceptualized as a context rich with potential natural mentors (see Table 1 for examples). Youth have choices. They can form different types of relationships with different adults. In one study, for example, youth serving on county boards formed their most valued mentoring relationships with adults outside those to whom they had been formally assigned (Collura, 2012). Ginwright (2010) reports that some youth, particularly

those living in vulnerable situations, search out natural mentors poised to facilitate emotional healing through instrumental activity such as activism (Ginwright, 2010). The emphasis on connecting healing with instrumental activity is summarized by Halpern (2005):

> "The consequences of accumulated hurts and insults are best addressed indirectly in the context of relationships that are about something else – that is, joint work on a task or project, or in a discipline – that are, in some respects, incidental. In such relationships, adults take youth seriously, but treat them matter-of-factly (p.15) ... When an adult leader or instructor focuses on the work rather than the adolescent, he/she is communicating a number of things, but most importantly that he/she views the adolescent as a person who can and should be doing the work" (p.17).

---- Table 1 about here ---

Reciprocal Activity

Co-learning and communities of practice are often identified by practitioners as a core element of Y-AP. Grounded in the principle of mutuality, and reflecting the belief that youth and adults often bring different perspectives and experiences to shared agendas, there is an emphasis on creating structures and norms for collective reflection and critical thinking among intergenerational groups (Libby et al., 2005; National Commission on Youth, 1974) (See Table 2 for examples). Studies of community practice have identified the efficacy of free and deliberative spaces where individuals are encouraged to share information, question assumptions, solve problems, and build social networks (Evans & Boyte, 1992; Schön, 1987; Wenger et al., 2002). The National League of Cities (2010), building from Camino's (2005) analysis of Y-AP

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implementation across diverse community settings, describes co-learning as follows:

"The key to the youth-adult relationship is understanding partnership. In many such relationships, the adult either dictates the agenda and controls what occurs, or leaves the young people alone and abdicates responsibility for what occurs. In a partnership, the adult ally and young people work `shoulder to shoulder' sharing ideas and expertise, translating information about one another's worlds, creating a mutual agenda, and taking joint responsibility for the outcome" (p. 31).

The terms co-learning and communities of practice may find their proper context in "reciprocity," as conceptualized by applied developmental scholars. At the macro level, reciprocity brings salience to the proposition that change, be it among systems and individuals, is a constant, and that changes in one level may promote changes in the other. Further, an emphasis on reciprocity underscores the logic that human development is a self-directed process that both creates and is informed by reflective intentionality and collective action (Lerner & Walls, 1999).   For example, two recent syntheses conclude that positive youth development and empowerment are enhanced under conditions of reciprocity, particularly when youth believe that they have made a contribution to others and when their life experiences have been validated by the community systems with which they have worked (Benson et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2010). Similarly, Hamilton and Hamilton (2009) conclude, "learning and development are enhanced when the partners experience greater reciprocity, deeper emotional attachment, and when the balance of power progressively shifts toward the youth" (p. 351).

Reciprocity across levels also occurs as adults engage in collective and reflective processes. In a multiyear case study of a high school, Fielding (2001) found that system change

occurred through the many structures designed to promote co-learning among students, teachers, and administrators. A norm of "radical collegiality" (p.129) slowly came to characterize the setting as adults better understood the concerns, language, and perspective of youth. In a study of community organizations, staff and board members reported that they were making more confident decisions for the benefit of their organizations as a consequence of partnering with youth on key issues (Zeldin, 2004). Similarly, when coalitions enact Y-AP as a planning strategy within communities, studies indicate that adults are increasingly motivated to include youth in further deliberations, and to advocate for youth voice throughout the community (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003; Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007). Y-AP may be an especially powerful experience for adults who have previously been excluded from community leadership. Partnering with youth around issues of equity and justice may motivate many adults – community residents and program staff – to engage in self care and collective healing to address their own painful experiences with poverty, racism, and other sources of trauma (Camino, 2000; Ginwright, 2005).

Community Connectedness

The building of community networks is a core element of Y-AP. In part, this is an operational necessity. Sustainability of community initiatives increasingly depends on support from a myriad of formal and informal sources, organizational and individual (Enfield & Owens, 2009; Ozer et al., 2008). Further, community networks offer a web of scaffolding for positive youth development and empowerment. For some practitioners, building networks encourages new friendships among peers, a sharing of inter-cultural and ecumenical perspectives, and a sense of common cause (Christens & Dolan, 2011). For others, the purpose is more instrumental, with the aim being to enhance young people's social capital, especially among those who lack

access in their day-to-day lives (see Table 2 for examples). Indeed, the connections formed through Y-AP have been found to translate into opportunities for scholarships, awards, internships, and employment among low income and minority youth (Lewis-Charp, et al., 2003; Jarrett, 2003). One consequence is that youth become less wary when adults "share" their social capital. They become more trusting of adults and do not only perceive them as possible contacts for jobs or reference letters (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Zeldin, 2004).

Community oriented scholars emphasize community networks as influential contexts for development. The access to social capital and the opportunities to form relationships with diverse persons can enhance feelings of connectedness with adults and public institutions which, in turn, are strong predictors of civic engagement (Heck and Fowler, 2008), adolescent health (Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993), social trust (Flanagan, 2003), and school achievement (Goza & Ryabov, 2009). In one study, the most powerful predictor of community connectedness was when young people felt that they had meaningful roles allowing them to hold power and exercise their influence (Whitlock, 2007). Similarly, youth who experience voice and power in intergenerational networks of program decision making have been found to have a stronger psychological sense of community (Evans, 2007). The peer relationships, the work being done, and the feeling of being part of something larger result in strong feelings of group solidarity and membership (Kirshner. 2009). Working toward a shared goal also helps young people discover and understand differences across diverse groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion), and over time, to act with awareness in relation to difference (Watkins, Larson & Sullivan, 2007).

Adults may also gain a sense of connectedness through Y-AP. Positive changes in adult

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perceptions are often the most immediate impact of Y-AP, with adults changing their stereotypes of youth from ambivalent or negative, to positive. Sharing successes with youth has been found to exhilarate adult partners and reinforce collective purposes, which contribute to feelings of organizational membership and commitment among minority staff (Ginwright, 2005; Lewis-Charp et al., 2003). Moreover, Y-AP becomes a source of generativity for adult partners as they extend their own experiences and skills to the next generation (Zeldin et al., 2008). Perhaps less visible, but equally important, is that Y-AP often motivates community leaders. As these adults observe young people in productive action, and have the chance to interact with them, coalitions and collaborations are inspired to take collective action on behalf of youth and community wellbeing (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007; Snyder, 2008). Indeed, results from several longstanding initiatives demonstrate that as Y-AP becomes an institutionalized norm, youth voice gets integrated into civic agendas, and policies are enacted to serve youth and communities with new resources and programs (Petrokubi, 2012; Sirriani & Friedland, 2001; Zeldin et al, 2008).

--Table 2 about here--

Conclusion

Youth policy in the United States has long reflected a concern with protection, both of and from young people. This deep ambivalence, intertwined within the economic and social structures of the country, has resulted in the isolation of youth from civil society. Youth and adults rarely interact in organizational and community arenas of decision making and collective action (Hine, 1999; Meucci & Schwab, 1997; Modell & Goodman, 1990). Scholars, policy

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groups, and community practitioners have questioned this status quo over the past 40 years. Mary McAlesse (2009), president of UNESCO, states the concern directly: "the cost of not doing so [involving young people in shared decision-making] will likely come back to haunt us as a civil society and a golden opportunity to move toward a fuller and more inclusive wisdom will have been missed."

The notion that youth can collaborate with adults on things that matter appears to be gradually becoming a public idea, and youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) is becoming a phenomenon of interest to scholars across disciplines. The diverse lines of inquiry converge to indicate that Y-AP provides a context through which citizens of different generations may come together to address pressing issues in settings such as organizational governance and community organizing. In such settings, Y-AP serves as an active ingredient of positive youth and civic development and a catalyst of community change. The scholarship also converges to identify the parameters of Y-AP: multiple youth and multiple adults, deliberating and acting in a collective or democratic fashion, over a sustained period time, through shared work on issues of concern to both parties. This constellation of role, activity, and behavior distinguishes Y-AP from other types of interactions between youth and adults. Finally, the synthesis of community practice with empirical study indicates four core elements of Y-AP: authentic decision making, natural mentors, reciprocal activity, and community connectedness.

There is a strong need for more research examining the processes and outcomes of Y-AP. The present review has demonstrated the strong policy rationale for the practice and its grounding in developmental and community theory. We have explored the broad empirical foundation for the core elements of the practice. Yet, there is a dearth of research and evaluation

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that examines programming where Y-AP is the salient philosophy and key design feature for implementation. This gap is significant. We believe that Y-AP is most influential when conceptualized and implemented as a unifying construct and that development is diluted when one or more of the elements is not available. That is, the practice will be most effective when all core elements are present. Indeed, it is possible that the Y-AP experience could have a detrimental effect on youth if the core elements are absent or the developmental quality of the participation is poor (Ferreira, Azevedo & Menezes, 2012). These hypotheses need to be directly tested, however. In addition to program-based empirical research, longitudinal investigations using multiple samples are needed to explore the core elements of Y-AP as they unfold in different ecological contexts and settings.

Researchers are increasingly studying and seeking to promote setting level changes within programs and communities to facilitate human development (Larson et al., 2009; Tseng & Seidman, 2007). Y-AP, we argue, could be useful in conceptualizing these settings. Indeed, the promise of Y-AP is that it can exist across a range of program and community contexts. To achieve this potential, however, foundational empirical work needs to continue. As Y-AP has been increasingly embraced by community practitioners, the term has taken on highly diverse meanings. If Y-AP is to become a focal point for the design of settings, it needs further observation, description, and categorization (Wong et al., 2012). Extended case study methodologies, conducted over a sustained period of time, will help articulate the defining parameters of Y-AP and will further our understanding of how communities can integrate the practice into existing and new settings and governance structures (Zeldin et al., 2008). Current ongoing studies are promising in this regard (McAlister, Mediratta & Shah, 2009; Petrokubi,

2012). This knowledge will, over time, serve to ground practice fully in extant scholarship and contribute to the establishment of guidelines and rubrics for quality implementation.

From a policy perspective, there exists an ongoing dialectic between individual and community-oriented approaches to youth programming, and within that context, a fundamental paradox. On the one hand, society has a deep responsibility to provide individual youth, especially the most vulnerable, with a full array of developmental support, guidance, and emotional support. Age and the specific developmental needs of individuals matter significantly. On the other hand, transformative organizational and social change demands that everybody contribute what they can in ways consistent with their own skill set, availability, and commitment. The age of the participants is not the most central issue. It is what each person is able and willing to bring to the table that is most important. Everybody is needed and everybody has a role.

We have come to believe that Y-AP allows a reconciliation, an integration, of individual and community approaches to programming. By emphasizing the intergenerational and action-oriented nature of Y-AP, with a focus on implementing the core elements, it becomes possible to construct settings that concurrently promote both youth development and community change. Toward that end, we can only hope that the policy-oriented reports of the past receive a second reading. These reports remain relevant today as scholars and practitioners seek to bring together generations within a civil society. There exists a heightened urgency. As more communities and schools become "high risk," and as more youth become detached from formal education and from employment markets for longer periods of time, development for all is being threatened (National Research Council, 1995). A focus on Y-AP as an active ingredient of positive youth

and civic development provides a potential policy strategy through which to strengthen public institutions, voluntary associations, and community programs. It also offers a lens through which scholars can continue to inform policy makers about the larger issues of power and participation in communities.

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Table 1. Case Examples of Core Elements of Youth-Adult Partnership: Authentic Decision Making and Natural Mentors.

	Authentic Decision Making	Natural Mentors
Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY)	AVEY seeks to match youths' capacity with opportunities to participate. The aim is to scaffold youth through "pathways of Y-AP" through which young people are expected to take on progressively greater responsibility. For example, AVEY operates "Stand Up Clubs" in high schools. These organizing groups identify campus issues, and then plan events with teachers and parents to address them. For more experienced youth, AVEY implements other initiatives such as "Community Conversations." Youth facilitate community dialogue processes, such as workshops and candidate forums, to gather priorities from stakeholders in neighborhoods across Austin. The most skilled youth (some of whom have graduated high school) are hired as Youth Consultants. Consultants work closely with staff and residents on key organizational tasks such as program development, community research, fundraising, and event planning.	Active participation by youth is seen as being critical to the effectiveness and credibility of the organization. AVEY staff emphasized that they are a "youth-centered" rather than a "youth driven" organization, in recognition of the need for clear and complementary roles for adults. Adults describe themselves as "conductors" who provide youth with practical coaching and strategic support for carrying out collective action. The adult role is especially important given that AVEY works in collaboration policy makers and school officials to influence district-wide change. The high stakes and visibility require both youth and adults to be at the top of their game. Youth appreciate the high expectations put forth by staff, and they appreciate the training and tools that staff provide. Interviews further reveal that youth are challenged by, and benefit from, frequent interactions with a variety of community residents and elected leaders. While not all of these adults were supportive of the young people, of course, the youth could readily identify multiple adults with whom they had developed respectful relationships. Many youth spoke to how these experiences contributed to an enhanced sense of efficacy, empowerment, and civic competence.

| *Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC)* | Like many grassroots organizing groups, ICUC leaders select the community problems that become the focus of their organizing efforts through extensive listening and relationship-building processes. In the case of ICUC youth organizing, that process involves youth and adult organizers deliberating together. When youth organizing began at ICUC, the focus was on reducing violence in the city. Many youth were passionate about the problem of violence after the murder of one of their high-school classmates in a drive-by shooting in 2005. More recently, however, the attention of many of the ICUC youth groups has shifted from anti-violence work to organizing around educational opportunities for youth in the region. The strategies for organizing around an issue are also determined collaboratively between youth and adult organizers. Typically, when taking on a new community issue, youth will lead a series of "research actions" with local decision-makers and elected officials to build an understanding of the issue from the perspective of adults with power, to build their own analysis of the issue, and to identify possible solutions in preparation for larger public action meetings. | ICUC youth work with numerous adults in their organizing efforts. Professional adult organizers guide youth organizers both formally and informally in efforts to address community violence. As part of their anti-violence initiative, ICUC youth began a series of research action meetings with public officials – school board members, police, members of the city council – to understand the issue and the possibilities for solutions. Through these meetings, young people build relationships and networks with local decision-makers. They receive formal training from ICUC adults on how to chair and conduct these meetings, as well as less formal guidance ("showing, not telling") on claiming their own power while interacting with powerful adults. Youth speak positively about the guidance they receive from their adult organizer allies, including professional staff and volunteers, and some parents. Youth also describe intentional efforts to develop other youth as leaders, particularly newer members as they become involved. |

Table 2. Case Examples of Core Elements of Youth-Adult Partnership: Reciprocal Activity and Community Connectedness.

	Reciprocal Activity	Community Connectedness
Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY)	AVEY explicitly seeks to promote mutuality at multiple levels. Stakeholders emphasize that AVEY facilitates a two-way flow of information between students, residents, and schools. At the individual level, staff promote reciprocity with youth by validating their lived experience and seriously considering their perspectives. This expectation is conveyed to other adults. Dialogue activities that promote group reflection, collaboration, and mutual respect are a regular part of youth and adult meetings. Such efforts lead to broader influences. One community leader noted that AVEY youth and staff serve as a "bridge" by documenting the concerns expressed by community members and communicating these concerns to policy-makers in ways that both audiences can relate to. She concluded that AVEY is "the group that gets the information out there so people know what's going on and can be involved in it." Consequently, some influential community leaders have confronted their negative stereotypes about youth and have become advocates for youth-adult partnerships in civic life.	AVEY spends much time engaging in planning and collective action with their peers. Almost all youth, for example, are involved in mobilizing their fellow students to address school issues. Youth speak at length about these interactions. Many view themselves as organizational pioneers. They express a great deal of pride in knowing that they were creating opportunities for future cohorts of youth, and many report feeling more emotionally connected to their schools and communities. Youth also appreciate the instrumental and emotional connections with adults. They gained access to recommendations and networks that led directly to jobs and referrals to needed community services. One youth concludes: "That there is a group of adults dedicated to children's learning is amazing to me. I didn't even know. I just knew I wasn't satisfied with school and that is the reason I jointed AVEY. "

Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC)	Some adult members of ICUC were initially skeptical about the potential for youth organizing to be successful in changing local policies, and for the youth organizing initiative to be sustainable. Other adults in the group, however, quickly became supporters and participants in the youth organizing initiative. Over time, the youth organizing initiative actually has eclipsed the adult organizing in ICUC, meeting with considerable success in concrete policy changes. Using tactics for social action, the youth organizing initiative has demonstrated the capabilities of young people to participate and contribute to policy deliberations on issues that relate to their lives, their schools, and their city. The successes of the ICUC youth organizing has changed the ways that the adults organize, such that many community issues are now addressed through intergenerational collaborative leadership. Moreover, some older youth have stayed involved through college and after, investing their time in the development of new cohorts of young leaders. Further, the initiative has changed city and school leaders' perceptions of youth by demonstrating the capabilities of young people to identify pressing issues, conduct research, take action, and sustain a powerful organization.	Youth form tight-knit connections with fellow organizers, with some describing their group as a "second family". More broadly, ICUC youth become connected with peers in their schools and communities through participatory action research projects on community issues. Youth encounter key decision makers and experts (e.g., city councilpersons, university professors, school board members), and form relationships of varying types with them. As one young ICUC organizer said, "community change takes time and involves having a lot of relationships with people in power." (Christens & Dolan, p. 539). Some of these people in power might become allies of the organizing initiative, and sources of possible future opportunities for the youth (e.g., jobs, awards, letters of recommendation). Others become the targets of strategic collective action. The connectedness of young people extends beyond contact with individual people to an ongoing analysis of the networks of relationships, power and influence in their local community.

Figure 1. Core Elements of Youth-Adult Partnership.

Settings

Governance

Organizing & Advocacy

Service

Core Elements

• *Authentic Decision Making*

• *Natural Mentors*

• *Reciprocal Activity*

• *Community Connectedness*

Active Ingredient:

Youth-Adult Partnership
– The practice of [a] multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together [b] in a collective (democratic) fashion [c] over a sustained period of time [d] through shared work [e] intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or to affirmatively address a community issue.

Programs

Outreach

Research & Evaluation

Philanthropy