Memorandum

Date: May 2, 2018
To: The California Endowment, Board of Directors
From: The California Endowment’s President’s Youth Council (PYC)
RE: The PYC’s Recommendations for TCE’s Investment Beyond 2020

The Urgent Need for Youth Leadership

If there was ever a time to take bold action for equity, inclusion, and social justice that time is now. The escalation of racism, patriarchy, and environmental degradation that has played out on the national stage in recent months shines light on social forces that have been bubbling under the surface for decades. The California Endowment (TCE) identified youth leadership as one of its “Five Drivers of Change” and has learned a great deal about the critical role of youth leadership to fight for, win, and implement social justice. Youth leaders in California have made significant gains toward social justice outcomes that can serve as a model for the rest of the country. Most recently, through the national conversation on gun violence, it has become even more clear that youth and young adults are the ones providing bold values-based leadership in this political moment. With so much at stake, the time is now to “double-down” on an investment in the leadership of young people.
While the majority of Americans may view young people of color as marginal or as “someone else’s problem,” The California Endowment has illuminated the fact that more than 70% of Californians under the age of 25 identify as people of color. To solve the social and economic crises that we face and to create real health equity, TCE’s President’s Youth Council (PYC) firmly believes that we need to look to young people of color as the solution - young people from communities struggling with issues such as gun violence, low performing schools, and poor health outcomes. The time has come to support the leadership of young people, who are closest to the issues to create healthy, peaceful, and thriving communities and to sustain the changes that we create.

Young people have always played a key role in social change movements, particularly in U.S. racial justice movements. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), led by young African American college students, was one of the core organizations of the Civil Rights Movement. And young people were the backbone of the U.S. anti-apartheid movement, the Chicano Youth Movement which led the East LA walkouts, and the fight at Standing Rock.

Young people are ideal change-makers because they are less attached to conventional ways of doing things. They gravitate toward creativity, innovation, and new ideas. They are less invested in the current system and tend to be more willing to take social and political risks. Neuroscience now shows that teens and young adults undergo a period of rapid brain development characterized, in part, by a willingness to take risks. Systems (such as government systems, institutions, etc.) are, by their very nature, designed to create consistency and predictability and are therefore difficult to change unless the people who control them are pushed to take risks. Most recently, we have seen youth leadership at the center of the national debate on gun violence and the March for our Lives Movement which has inspired people across the country following the mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The young leaders who have emerged in this movement are swiftly building multi-racial solidarity, taking daring risks, and providing moral leadership for the nation.
Lessons on Youth Leadership From BHC

Here we lift up five important lessons learned from our BHC work:

1. **Youth leadership is indispensable in winning and sustaining equity and systems change.**
   An investment in youth contributes to long-term leadership development which, in turn, transforms narratives and creates policy and systems change. TCE has invested in youth-based organizations in the most underserved communities across California, many of which have significant youth/young adult populations yet limited resources and opportunities. Communities such as City Heights, Kern, San Diego, East Oakland, Merced and South Los Angeles have mobilized and educated students to advocate for improved school climate by implementing restorative justice practices. In the City Heights area of San Diego, young people met with the San Diego Unified School District Trustees and Board of Supervisors, conducted focus groups, and attended School District meetings – resulting in the successful implementation of a district-wide restorative justice pilot program. The program included training for teachers and students to lead community circles. Youth involved in efforts to dismantle the school to prison pipeline have been directly impacted by the policies and legislation that they seek to change or they have family members who have been affected. Young people advocated for statewide policy changes such as Propositions 47 and 57 that reduce mass incarceration and reinvest funds away from the criminal justice system and into community based alternatives.

2. **Young leaders learn about the power of their vote through civic engagement and political education as they simultaneously discover the power of their voice through storytelling.**
   Youth led campaigns are an opportunity for young people to develop their passion and come into their own voice; in 2016, 66% of BHC youth leaders who were surveyed in a study reported that they learned to stand up for their beliefs. The opportunity to grow their confidence and create a stronger and more positive mentality allows them to voice their concerns and demand their needs. The civic participation of young people ensures that the systems and institutions serve young people and their families, and it creates the conditions and opportunities for young people to thrive.
3. **Young people must be included in decision-making.**
   Young people have become decision makers in these systems change efforts - holding seats at leadership tables, organizing events for their peers, and working collaboratively to share power amongst stakeholders. Youth representation and authentic youth voice in decision making processes are vital to provide a youth “friendly” environment that avoids “tokenization.” A reported 74% of youth who were surveyed in the previously mentioned study have been in meetings with individuals who hold institutional power.

4. **Healing is a key to youth power and leadership.**
   We have seen through BHC that as young people develop leadership skills like public speaking and event planning, they also must work to heal emotional and mental trauma. We have witnessed, first hand and within the context of supporting youth leadership, the importance of attending to the trauma caused by the social issues we seek to transform. TCE Board Vice Chair, Professor Shawn Ginwright, refers to this type of trauma as “social toxicity” It is clear that we need an integrated approach to youth leadership - one in which young people are leading healing and talking circles and facilitating workshops and sessions on issues campaigns that they value.

5. **Multi-generational and peer relationships matter.**
   Through all of these accomplishments, youth not only have contributed to systematic change in their local communities, they also create positive relationships with adult mentors and other youth that have been shown to increase social emotional learning outcomes and bolster leadership abilities. Youth who engage in spaces with adult mentors and peers who share similar life experiences allows them to learn about themselves and others. In 2016, 62% of BHC youth said that they built or strengthened trusting relationships through their involvement. Mentorship gives youth access to guidance and support not only through the journey of leadership development, but also through the journey to self discovery. An adult ally is vital to the engagement of individuals at a young age, as the adult allies can serve as confidants and role models.

   "Youth leaders and their adult allies are the ‘secret sauce’ of BHC. Youth engagement builds agency, strengthens collaboration, drives new and positive narratives for systemic change, engages artists and expert storytellers to articulate the need for change, and illuminates the path towards a bold vision for a healthier, more inclusive California.”

   -An excerpt from “A Message from The California Endowment to our Thought Partners” by Dr. Robert K. Ross, Dr. Shawn Ginwright, Zac Guevara
Recommendations

As Members of the President’s Youth Council, we represent communities who have borne the brunt of inequality. This has had real and day-to-day impacts on our lives. We know what it is like to live in communities where people struggle without having all of their basic needs met, such as safety, housing, healthcare, healthy food, transportation, and quality education. And even as the economy expands, economic prosperity is not benefiting all people equally. Some communities continue to be economically stranded. Many of our communities are experiencing extreme housing crises, displacement, rising rates of homelessness, and gentrification—leaving young people of color pushed further to the margins.

From the federal level on down, attacks against immigrant communities are escalating and police violence directed at Black and Brown people is intensifying. These violent attacks on the most vulnerable communities are launched from the highest levels of government and are felt at the local level. We have seen and experienced the very real impacts of racial, economic, and social inequality and we believe that young people must be at the forefront of the movement to create a more just and equitable California—a California where young people of color, low-income young people, young people who are immigrants, Black and Brown young people, LGBTQ+ young people, and their families and friends have all their basic needs met. This is the California that we envision and it is the California we deserve.
The California Endowment’s President’s Youth Council has a series of recommendations about where TCE ought to invest beyond the year 2020. We are pleased to present these recommendations to the President & CEO, Dr. Robert K. Ross, and to the TCE Board of Directors.

VISION A) Winning an Intersectional Racial Justice: Turning the tide on Attacks against Communities of Color and Young People of Color

Here in our state, there are at least three primary vehicles through which racism and racial inequality are allowed to persist in 2018. These vehicles include Immigration Policy, Criminalization/Mass Incarceration, and attacks against LGBTQ+ communities. These issues limit the political and economic power of Black and Brown communities, and other communities of color such as Southeast Asian communities and Native / First Nation communities, and disrupt our safety and well-being. The PYC believes that to create a just, equitable, and inclusive California we must be bold and take on an agenda of Intersectional Racial Justice which addresses the fundamental ways in which communities of color are being systematically attacked and disempowered.

“From my family’s background it has been really difficult. My family has to really fear and I have to fear if they can be here or not. Before, we had fear but didn’t think about it. Now with this administration, the fear is more real and we think about the very real possibility that something could happen any day. I feel a mixture of anger, fear and feeling anxiousness. If I could mix that up and make one emotion that’s what it would be.

... Blacks Lives Matters, Immigrations, LGBT issues. These issues are still very separate and organizers say they are inclusive, but still look down upon another group’s issues in a passive way. I feel like we’re all fighting the same system but we are still separating ourselves. We need more education and understanding of each other’s struggles. We’re all fighting the same system. Being oppressed, most of us all live in the same underserved communities. We should be working together more towards our targets of the same elected officials or corporations but we don’t... A big example is the LGBT community. A lot of us still ignore that community and the issues and campaigns. I think there is still a lot of misunderstanding. At the Free Our Dreams events, when LGBT issues are brought up, I still hear homophobic slurs coming from young people, adults and community members. It happens a lot more than people...
think. For genuine coalition building we need more education, more political education. For example, I don’t know what it’s like to be a young black man, or a young gay or trans man. I could fall into biases because of what I don’t understand. I think when everyone comes together for Free Our Dreams, we need to practice being open-minded by having workshops to learn about each other’s struggles and find common ground.”

–PYC Member Efrain Botello, Fresno

**BIG BET 1) Just & Transformative Immigration Policy**

TCE invests in efforts, organizations, and campaigns that engage youth to push for the following policy changes:

1. Youth advocacy efforts toward a stable, accessible and long-term pathway to citizenship for undocumented individuals, and DACA Beneficiaries. This could include potential sponsorship from employers and other private sector pathways.

2. Youth advocacy efforts toward a long-term health care access that is reliable for undocumented individuals and refugee people.

**BIG BET 2) End Mass Incarceration & Reinvest in Alternatives**

TCE invests in efforts, organizations, and campaigns that engage youth to:

1. Close youth prisons in California and end youth incarceration and mass incarceration.

2. Create state and local budget line items for positive youth development, community healing centers, and economic opportunities funded through cost savings from ending mass incarceration - through the principle of “Justice Reinvestment.”

3. Utilize technology and tools that allow for community members to hold police and other law enforcement officers accountable, such as the use of a phone app that would send video straight to the cloud in the case of police brutality.
BIG BET 3) **Beyond Marriage: Liberation for Trans and Queer People of Color**

TCE invests in efforts, organizations, and campaigns that engage youth to push for:

1. Protections from discrimination in the workplace, schools and communities.
2. An end to youth homelessness especially among LGBTQ+ young people of color.
3. Access to affordable mental health, sexual health, and gender identity health services.
4. Policies that confront systemic homophobia and transphobia within systems such as health care agencies, prisons, immigration systems, law enforcement agencies, schools, the child welfare system, etc.
5. An end to generational bias and discrimination.

**VISION B)**

**Building Youth Leadership & The Capacity to Win**

Dr. Ross refers to youth leadership development and youth organizing as a “double bottom-line investment.” Youth organizing transforms the lives of young people as they grow into their own power and agency at the same time that it advances policy and systems change. Through the process of engaging, building relationships with, and supporting youth leaders across the state, we have become present to the levels of trauma that community members - youth and adults alike - have been exposed to as a result of many of the issues that we seek to change, for example the trauma of having family members separated due to deportation, mass incarceration, or LGBTQ+ discrimination; the trauma of living in a community where many people do not have access to livable wages or access to health care, and the trauma of living through widespread gun violence in your neighborhood. We are clear about the need for an integrated and holistic approach to youth leadership which incorporates healing and youth leadership development.
“A lot of people that I know in my community that I grew up with are dead or are in jail. Honestly, I’m really numb to it because I’m surrounded by it my whole life. It’s puzzling but numbness is the story. My experience is that I’ve seen people killed in front of me, I’ve seen dead bodies at the age of 5. The neighborhood Arroyo Park and Webster Academy school... back then a whole lot of stuff went down when I was a little kid.”

–Olondis Walker, Oakland, PYC Member

“There needs to be more attention paid to building the leadership of Black communities in particular with African American Youth. Black youth are most directly affected by the campaigns that we have worked on including the school to prison pipeline. These issues disproportionately affect the African American community. We have to be intentional in building and elevating the voices of Black leadership. I also think that we need to pay attention to other disenfranchised voices that are being left out such as Native American and South East Asian communities.”

–Nicole Lee, Oakland, PYC Member

BIG BET 4) Healing Youth Trauma

The PYC recommends the following ways to invest in youth healing from trauma:

1. Regular statewide healing retreats for youth leaders and local / regional community healing circles for youth and community members connected to the work.

2. Prioritize approaches to healing that put ancestral and indigenous roots, cultural traditions (both contemporary and traditional), and ancestral medicine at the center.

3. Approaches that incorporate healing and self-care into movement practices.

4. Creation of structures that can provide crisis support for youth leaders who may encounter emergency life challenges related to things such as housing, physical safety, court support, academic support, etc.
**BIG BET 5) Investing in Youth Leadership & Creating a Youth Leadership Pipeline**

The message, “be a leader” is reiterated throughout young people’s journeys within school, extracurricular activities, and by their families. In order for a young person to become the leader they want to be, the leader others want to see, they must be equipped and supported with skills and knowledge. They should have the ability and opportunities to receive a paid/rewarding position that allows them to continue and put into practice the skills they have learned. The PYC has identified the need for a larger, professional and sustainable training pipeline.

The PYC recommends that TCE commits at least 60% of TCE’s grants towards supporting a youth leadership pipeline and youth organizing to:

1. Create a “Highlander West” or “Harvard of Youth Organizing” Institute with a career pipeline that:
   a. Provides an advanced political education program that can foster the political and ideological development of young organizers and activists of color.
   b. Provides internships and apprenticeship programs for organizing with tiered compensation and opportunities for advancement and long-term employment.
   c. Increases the scale and capacity of youth and young adult organizing in California with a goal of preparing 3000+ young people of color to be professional organizers over 10 years.

2. Strengthen the infrastructure for Black youth organizing and organizing efforts among under-represented groups such as Native youth, Southeast Asian youth, girls of color, and Queer, Trans, and Gender Non-conforming youth of color.

3. Develop a statewide “Americorps”-like fellowship for youth organizers of color who can participate in the program for 1-2 years while they are placed to work with community organizing and youth organizing groups with a subsidized wage. This fellowship program would place 1000+ fellows over 10 years.

4. Grow a statewide network for youth organizing comprised of organizations representing thousands of young people throughout the state which can also serve as a clearinghouse for youth organizing resources and capacity building.
VISION C) Youth Governance

The process of building youth power also requires us to guide and support young people to practice their leadership abilities by taking positions of formal or institutional power. This allows youth leaders to challenge their own conceptions about what they are capable of and look for ways to strengthen their leadership and sense of self. And in turn, systems and institutions greatly benefit from creating seats at the table for the voices, perspectives, and ideas of young people in ways that drive the kind of problem-solving and innovation that youth leaders have to offer. This requires a sustainable infrastructure that ensures ongoing support and long-term investment.

“I hear staff from so many organizations building youth leaders but then I don’t hear them speak about what to do once they are built. Not from personal experience but from friends and youth I know from the years...that eventually end up being pushed out from the spaces of youth development once they age out. I think this goes back to not listening to the young people about their needs. I think it’s a combination of both developing the young people and allowing them to take the next step with those skills and leadership development for that next phase in their life. Through my experience, I invested time being with organizations, working on campaigns and once I reach an age of leaving my community, my network didn’t provide guidance of what I can do next. ... That is hard for a young person to discover and learn on their own.”

–Leslie Renteria-Salome, City Heights and Merced, PYC Member

“I think that the BHC site is doing a great job of including youth into their campaigns but I would like to see more youth involvement including in the bigger campaigns and in other bodies of work that TCE leads such as having a youth member on the Board of Directors. I was the only person that sat on the Youth Steering Committee and I felt that that was a lot of weight to put on one young person. I would like to see more young people involved in the internal executive processes.”

–Aunjanae “AJ” Lawson, Sacramento, PYC Member
BIG BET 6) Access to Institutional Power & Representation for Young People of Color

1. TCE creates two Youth Seats for the PYC who will sit as voting members of its Board of Directors to accurately and authentically garner youth input in the policies and practices of the organization.

2. TCE invests in training and capacity building for young people of color to engage in electoral politics and prepare them to run for office with a focus on:
   a. Boards of Non-Profit Organizations
   b. Senate / Assembly
   c. Local Government
   d. County Government
   e. Boards & Commissions

3. Conduct a scan of TCE policies and practices, process and culture to identify barriers that can be eliminated or reduced to support youth led organizations better.
BIG BET 7) Youth Led Spaces

PYC members have had direct experiences with the important role that physical space and “youth centered spaces” have in providing youth with positive alternatives to being out on the streets. Youth engaged in BHC have had opportunities to be part of statewide youth spaces like: Sisterhood Rising Leadership Retreat, Sons and Brothers Camp, LGBTQ Summit and Free Our Dreams Organizing Summit. Youth led programs and youth spaces allow young people to network with other leaders who share similar experiences in their communities. We know how critical it is to create safe spaces that center the leadership and experiences of young people. We recommend:

1. TCE Headquarters have conference centers available for youth organizations to use during the week, in the evenings and on weekends.

2. Youth Led Centers are created locally or by region. These “For Us By Us” Multiuse Youth Centers would provide opportunities for young people in our communities to focus and be supported in specific areas: workforce/internship programs; academic success/career pathways; community organizing training; development in entrepreneurship, leadership, and social justice knowledge; trauma-informed community healing, life skills; arts and culture, and serving as resource anchors.
Conclusion

With this memo, the PYC is calling on TCE’s Board to up the ante on investing in youth leaders and their capacity to change the world for the better. Through our recommendations, we uplift our vision in three areas: (1) To create a just, equitable, and inclusive California, we must be bold and take on an agenda of Intersectional Racial Justice; (2) We need a pipeline for youth leadership which takes a holistic approach that incorporates healing and youth leadership development; and (3) Young people need opportunities to exercise their leadership abilities by taking positions of formal or institutional power, at TCE, in public office, and in the creation and management of youth-led spaces.

We are answering the call to be leaders and makers of our future. We call on TCE to continue and step up in its support for our leadership.

Background

The President’s Youth Council: The California Endowment’s President’s Youth Council is a statewide body of youth and young adults who have served in their local communities as leaders for health equity. The PYC is charged with providing thought leadership, youth perspectives, and candid feedback on The California Endowment’s campaigns and strategies in the pursuit of health and justice. Additionally, PYC Members serve as youth ambassadors for TCE at events and in initiatives across the state and the nation.

There are currently 12 PYC Members representing the following communities: Richmond, South Central Los Angeles, East Oakland, City Heights San Diego, the Eastern Coachella Valley, Long Beach, East Salinas, Kern County, Sacramento, Fresno, Merced, and Del Norte.

The PYC works directly with the President & CEO of The California Endowment, Dr. Robert K. Ross. Additionally, Members work in coordination with TCE’s statewide youth organizing strategy through TCE Program Manager, Albert Maldonado.

At the December 2017 PYC meeting, through conversations between the President’s Youth Council, Dr. Ross, and the Chair and Vice Chair of The California Endowment’s Board of Directors, Zac Guevara and Shawn Ginwright, the PYC was given the charge to provide their perspective and to give a set of recommendations directly to Dr. Ross and to the Board of Directors in regard to the direction of TCE’s investment beyond the year 2020.
This Memo and the recommendations herein are dedicated to the memory of PYC Member, Brandon Harrison. We love and miss you, Brandon.

The President’s Youth Council

Tony Aguilar
tonyeaguilar@gmail.com
Maria Ambriz-Martinez
ambrizmaria93@gmail.com
Efrain Botello-Cisneros
efrain@fresnobarriosunidos.org
Christopher Covington
csc.covington1@gmail.com
Alicia De-Leon Mendoza
adeleonmendoza@gmail.com
Nile Haynes-Irby
nhaynesirby12@georgefox.edu
Aunjanae Lawson
ajayxd@gmail.com
Nicole Lee
nicole@urbanpeacemovement.org
Binti Musa
bintimusa@hotmail.com
Leslie Renteria-Salome
lesliee.renteria@gmail.com
Sompong Viengvilai
sompongvuongvilai@gmail.com
Olondis Walker
olondisg4gf@gmail.com
Dean Welliver
deanwelliver@gmail.com

photos: Sompong Viengvilai, PYC Member