



YOUTHSHIFT

2016

Answering the Call for Connection





YOUTHSHIFT

Join Me in the
Movement!
#YouthShift

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What is YouthShift?

YouthShift envisions a flourishing New Orleans in which all young people, their families, and their communities are happy, healthy, secure, and empowered. It is a volunteer group of non-profit and public organization leaders who have convened over the past four years to discuss better ways of supporting positive outcomes for ALL children in New Orleans.

YouthShift was designed in 2012 as a Collective Impact initiative and originally managed by the Partnership for Youth Development (PYD) as the backbone entity. The initiative sought to address the fact that, over the years, little improvement had been achieved in terms of key youth outcomes. Despite many organizations and collaborative endeavors in New Orleans supporting youth, measures related to youth violence, school attachment and success, youth employment, and other areas hadn't improved. Original YouthShift partners included a diverse array of non-profit organizations and public entities — from out of school time providers, to early childhood advocates, to programs focused on Opportunity Youth, to public health organizations. All participants were looking ways to work together more effectively with and on behalf of children and youth in the city.

Advised by the Forum for Youth Investment (the Forum), a national youth development action-tank engaged with hundreds of communities across the United States, and with funding provided by Baptist Community Ministries and other local and national funders, YouthShift's theory of change stated:

TO CHANGE THE ODDS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH,

we must help our communities improve the quality and quantity of the supports available for young people from their families, schools and communities.

TO CHANGE THE LANDSCAPE OF COMMUNITIES AND THE SUPPORTS THEY PROVIDE,

we must first change the way we, as leaders, do business.

TO HELP US BE MORE SUCCESSFUL AS LEADERS,

we must build broader partnerships, set bigger goals, use better data and decision-making, and take bolder actions.

The graphic below illustrates the connections between these different elements. Essential steps to enacting this theory included convening a group of committed cross-sector partners, identifying key priorities that warrant collective focus, gathering data to assess how the community is performing on these priority areas, and devising a shared strategy for making change.

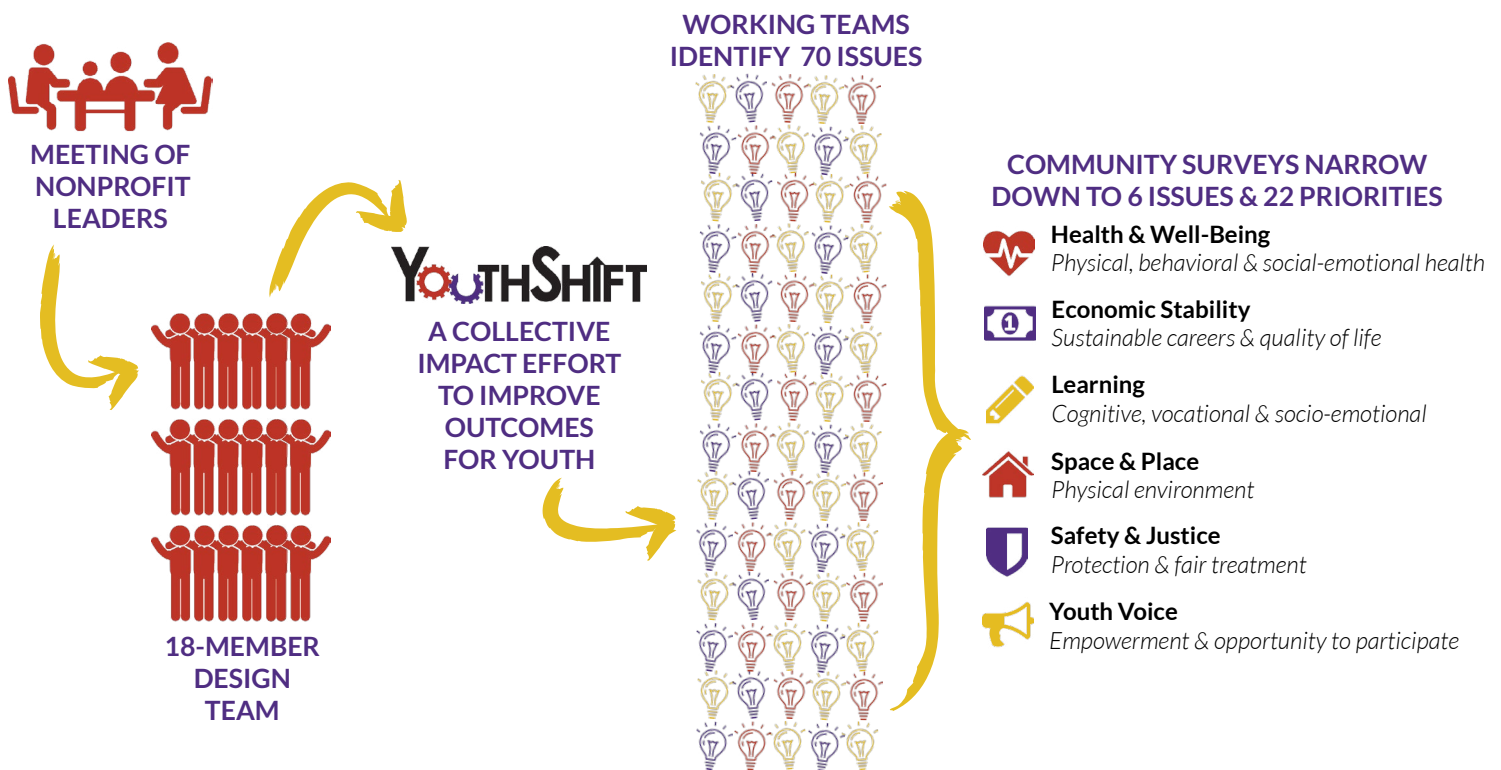
**TURNING THE FIRST GEAR
MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE!**



PYD continued to coordinate YouthShift activities through 2014. As part of that work, they established a YouthShift steering committee of nonprofit, local government, and youth-serving professionals that then developed a set of priority issues for future YouthShift focus. In 2015, the Steering Committee took over as the primary advising council for YouthShift's work with ongoing support from the Forum and local consultants.

YouthShift's Work

From its inception, YouthShift set about collecting data to gain a better understanding of the state of New Orleans youth and the barriers they face and engaging additional community members to inform its discussions. Activities included identifying and reviewing existing data, offering professional development trainings, convening focus groups of youth workers, and surveying youth programs and community leaders about their priorities and needs. Between 2012 and 2015, a total of 1,049 people representing more than 190 different organizations were engaged in various YouthShift meetings, outreach events, and focus groups. These activities eventually resulted in a focus on six key areas for collaborative focus with 22 specific conditions named as priorities for improvement. The image below illustrates the pathways taken to naming these conditions.



To understand how these outcomes change over time, The Data Center, New Orleans' premier data intermediary, was asked to develop the [New Orleans Youth Index](#) as a snapshot of New Orleans youth along these priority conditions. The first report was published in December 2015 and an updated edition released in December 2016. The data within the report is intended for use as a measuring stick for changes in youth outcomes from year to year.



DEVELOPING STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

A Call for Connection

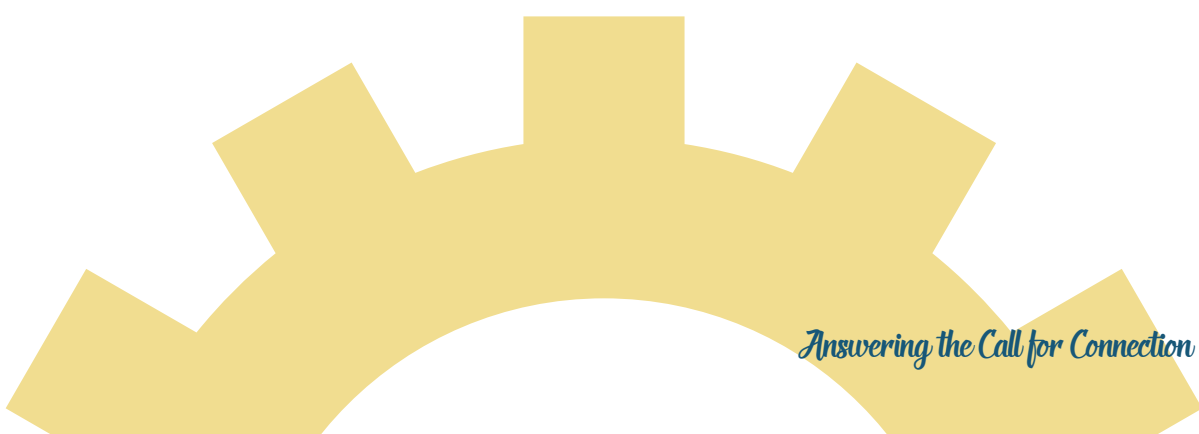
YouthShift solicited input on the best way to make changes that would positively impact the priority conditions by convening nonprofit, school, and public sector staff. These convenings resulted in five major recommendations for action highlighted in YouthShift's [A Call for Connection: Bridging the Divide for New Orleans Children and Youth](#) (December 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Increase the meaningful engagement between leaders of children and youth-serving organizations, young people, and parents themselves.
2. Gather more information about the well-being of children and youth in our community and what efforts address the YouthShift priorities.
3. Improve the quality of programs that serve children and youth in New Orleans by reinforcing the continued efforts of the K-12 school system, youth development programs, and early childhood sector to define, measure, and support quality improvement on an on-going basis.
4. Develop children- and youth-centered public policies and strategies to ensure that young people come first in New Orleans.
5. Identify and support an organization (or multiple organizations) to provide staffing, technical assistance, resources, and expertise to help execute these goals.

A Call for Connection also advocated for the creation of facilitated Action Teams to develop strategies and actionable steps for each of the five recommendations. The overall goal for the YouthShift Steering Committee in 2016 was to identify a permanent home for YouthShift's work and identify community strategies to inform and direct future activities. Steering committee members committed to:

- » "Walking the Walk" of being more inclusive. Youth and parents would be recruited and actively engaged in discussions and decision-making;
- » Reconvening focus groups who contributed to this report to share recommendations and solicit ideas; and
- » Cultivating a sustainable group of funders to support implementation of the Action Team recommendations including prioritizing the establishment of support organization that can provide staffing and technical assistance.





YouthShift in 2016

CREATING THE ACTION TEAMS

A high priority for YouthShift was to ensure that the work was more inclusive of youth-serving organizations led by people of color, youth, and parents. To increase engagement, YouthShift used press, radio, and television spots, sent out requests to over 300 partners who had engaged with YouthShift in the past, and utilized social media to invite participation in the Action Teams. In all, 83 individuals signed up to participate on one or more Action Teams.

The Steering Committee agreed to a nine-month community process undergirded by the work of the Action Teams. Committee members and funders identified facilitators who were issue experts with either community facilitation or community organizing experience for each of the five Action Teams. The first Action Team meetings took place between mid-March and early April 2016. Each team was charged with reviewing the recommendations in *A Call for Connection* and the proposed action steps. The teams were responsible for discussing ideas for implementing the recommendations and then developing a set of strategies and prioritizing next steps. Each team would produce a report for presentation to the YouthShift steering committee in September, 2016, which would in turn make those reports available on the website.

Additionally, the Steering Committee acknowledged the key role of the Intermediary Support Action Team in identifying an existing, or developing a plan for a new, organizational home for YouthShift that would be charged with the responsibility for raising funds and providing staff support to carry out action team recommendations. This action team was asked to finalize its recommendations in August, slightly ahead of the other action team timeline.

ACTION TEAM APPROACHES AND EVOLUTION

Action Team facilitators developed strategies for engaging their participants, recruiting additional input, and gathering data necessary for productive discussions. The Action Team for Program Quality, for example, started with members discussing the definition of “quality,” familiarizing themselves with how quality was defined and measured nationally and locally – and then exploring a New Orleans-centric definition of quality and ways of increasing quality youth programming. The Action Team on Engagement and Inclusion quickly concluded at their first meeting that their membership did not meet their definition of “inclusive.” Thus, more grassroots outreach was done to make it possible for diverse people to join in the action team discussions. The Engagement and Inclusion Action Team also made recommendations for diversifying participation to the other teams and steering committee.

Action Team facilitators discussed strategies and developments with the Steering Committee and together made key decisions that significantly changed the scope for two of the five teams. During the initial meetings of the Data team and Policy team, participants in each team grappled with the scope of their assigned task. For the Data team, questions arose about its ability to effectively map and connect existing data (e.g., program information) from across the city in order to be useful to multiple audiences.

The Policy team addressed a fundamental question about its capability in a short amount of time to identify and assess the myriad of policies at the local, state, and national level that affect all issue areas and conditions outlined by YouthShift. Discussions between the facilitators, YouthShift steering committee and funders resulted in a revised focus on a more specific deliverable for these two teams. Another important change was made with the Intermediary Support team. The facilitator from the Engagement and Inclusion team co-planned and co-facilitated additional activities to engage a wider swath of youth serving programs and organizations, especially those led by people of color and smaller organizations. More details about the work of each Action Team can be found on pages 9-12.



Key Learnings:

THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION

"I did take some things away. I learned more about how to center youth voice in a process that is about young people. I got a better sense of the tokenistic cheats. It's not the same as saying, 'Hey this is your table, what's important to you.'"

Collective Impact thought leaders have been calling attention to the previously unmentioned, but critically important role of equity in community change efforts. As Kania and Kramer [stated in 2015](#), "The five conditions of collective impact, implemented without attention to equity, are not enough to create lasting change...If participants in collective impact initiatives are to make the lasting change they seek, they must pay explicit attention to policies, practices, and culture that are reinforcing patterns of inequity in the community."

This topic was broached more fully by members of the YouthShift Steering Committee beginning in 2015, particularly in regards to the inclusion of young people in YouthShift's activities and decision-making. Committee members noted the absence of young people and the relative lack of diversity in terms of team members' race and background, and the size and location of the organizations they represented. These concerns had been present from the beginning of YouthShift, but members acknowledged that there had been significant gaps in following through on plans to change this. Noting this, the YouthShift Steering Committee prioritized inclusion and engagement, making it the first priority recommendation in *A Call for Connection*.

This issue came up again when Action Teams were first convened. Action Team facilitators made it clear to the Steering Committee that while efforts were made to recruit a diverse spectrum of community members, the resulting teams did not reflect the communities or small community-based organizations that support the low-income disadvantaged youth YouthShift most hopes to reach. Likewise, the teams had no youth representation.

YouthShift empowered the facilitators to use additional tactics and funds to ensure participation from youth and community-based organizations. This included the employment of a youth co-facilitator for the Engagement and Inclusion team as well as increased outreach to different types of youth-serving groups to ensure the perspective of young people was included. The Quality team contracted with Friends and Family of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) and their youth team, Black Men Rising (BMR), to participate in its team discussions and provide consultation on recommendations.

The facilitators for the Intermediary Support team and Engagement and Inclusion team co-facilitated the former's meetings and contracted with a leader of a small non-profit to assist with outreach to smaller non-profit organizations serving and led by people of color. Two focus groups were held with these organizations and a survey was conducted to a pool of 300+ people in the youth development field. Both of these strategies were employed to gain input from people who were not able to attend team meetings.

All of these efforts led to richer conversations and recommendations that were more community-focused. Furthermore, the Intermediary Support Action Team insisted that diversity of staff and board members be a non-negotiable priority to ensure that YouthShift's work going forward will reflect lessons learned. Interviews with YouthShift Steering Committee members illustrated the importance of inclusion of youth and community voice as a key takeaway of their participation. For example, one committee member remarked:

"It's great to see how over the past 5 years the appreciation and value of youth and the lived experience of those who are supposed to be 'helped' has really shifted. At least the language is shifting. I think that's in part because of our work."

THE IMPORTANCE OF BACKBONE CAPACITY AND LEADERSHIP

One of the key tenets of Collective Impact is the presence of a backbone organization that provides staffing and administrative capacity to ensure a Collective Impact initiative moves forward and is sustained. Reflecting on the importance of this component, the loss of its backbone organization (PYD) hampered YouthShift's capacity to actively engage with the community, its ability to respond to valid critiques, and its ability to seek sustainable supports. Committee members and others identified a few key lessons:

- » Diversity of the intermediary staff is crucial – it needs trusted connections with networks that work with and on behalf of youth across the city.
- » The intermediary must be reflective of the people and communities in which it works.
- » When critical transitions occur, open and frequent communication with the community must be maintained so that trust is retained and partners still feel connected to and a part of the work.
- » The intermediary should identify a few areas where it will focus and prove its value. But it cannot become a direct provider of services to children and families--to do so puts it in competition its constituents—youth serving organizations.

As YouthShift Steering Committee and Action Team members pointed out, even without permanent staffing or a backbone/organizational “home,” YouthShift was still able to produce some positive wins.

“The arc of [YouthShift’s] work is the reality faced by many communities in terms of transition whether it’s staff or organizations changing - this is real life. Enough of the people stayed the course. The fact that enough of the work was sustained to produce some quality products is a testament to their commitment.”



Action Team Results

ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION TEAM PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Rashida Govan served as the facilitator for the Engagement and Inclusion Action Team. In June, Myron Miller was added as a youth co-facilitator.

- » Hosted three action team meetings with 20 members participating
- » Engaged over 100 community stakeholders from twelve community organizations/youth-serving programs
- » Attended standing meetings for several community organizations
- » Facilitated group dialogues on engagement and inclusion
- » Solicited feedback to inform final recommendations on engagement and inclusion
- » Provided follow-up reporting to all engaged stakeholders for feedback

THE ACTION TEAM DEVELOPED THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS:

Engagement refers to the involvement of youth, families, and community members in youth programs and in the *program participation, leadership, advocacy, decision-making work, and capacity-building* efforts of youth-serving organizations.

Inclusion refers to the establishment of intentional practices, structures, and organizational cultures that facilitate the *safe* involvement of key stakeholders (e.g., youth, families, local community members from various populations represented in the city).

Who needs to be at the table? Discussion participants responded with an exhaustive list of community members who should be included in discussions to ensure true community engagement. The word cloud below illustrates that list.



PROGRAM QUALITY TEAM PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Hamilton Simons-Jones served as facilitator of the Program Quality Action Team. In June, he engaged the Friends and Family of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children and its youth group, Black Men Rising, to participate in the action team and develop a set of recommendations on program quality.

- » The Action Team met six times, engaging 36 people over the course of their meetings.
- » Meetings included a mix of peer brainstorming activities, presentations from experts, readings on best practice, and group discussions.

During the course of team meetings, two themes were frequently discussed:

1. HOW TO APPROACH QUALITY IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

- » Cultural competency needs to be included in quality frameworks and it needs to be clearly defined.
- » Relationships between adults and youth are critical to quality programming across settings.
- » Quality work needs to be inclusive of both formal and informal settings in which children and youth are served – informal providers are often the most culturally competent and can make the biggest impact as they are closest to the community.
- » There must be transparency about who is leading the effort to improve quality youth programming in New Orleans. The leaders need to be inclusive and representative of the community.

2. HOW TO IMPLEMENT QUALITY IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

- » Misaligned incentives and accountability must be addressed as they affect all age levels in all settings.
- » A means for tracking and rewarding growth must be incorporated into any accountability system.
- » Early care and education and the focus on adult-child interactions in that space must be a guiding influence, as it has focused on what adults are providing versus how kids are performing. Focusing on the relationship and practices in this way has been shown to produce better outcomes in terms of racial equity in discipline referrals.
- » Licensing for standards or permission to operate for youth development programs should be a goal – but it needs to be considerate of type of organization, capacity, etc. and be cautious about effects of high-stakes approaches.
- » Workforce issues in Youth Development and Education (hiring standards, pay, turnover, compensation, etc.) are important influences on quality and need to be addressed.

Youth members of Black Men Rising (BMR) developed and presented the following recommendations for how they and other youth can play an integral role in quality improvement discussions:

- » They noted that “Impacted families have been disenfranchised, disrespected, and left out of the conversation.”
- » Youth program staff and administrators should participate in Trauma Sensitivity training to understand environmental effects that have taken a toll on our youth, our families, and our communities.
- » BMR and other peer groups should be given access to the same research and information as decision-makers and allowed to share their personal experiences.
- » BMR will facilitate focus groups over the next 2 months within the FFLIC organization through our partnership with New Orleans College Prep.
- » BMR volunteers are prepared to serve in a capacity of Youth Assessors/Advisors as part of the YPQI pilot program.

INTERMEDIARY SUPPORT TEAM PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Pam Stevens led the Intermediary Support Action Team. Pam was assisted by April Scott, founder of Pink House, and Rashida Govan, facilitator of the Engagement and Inclusion Action Team and founder of Project Butterfly, a small nonprofit working to mentor young girls in New Orleans.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES:

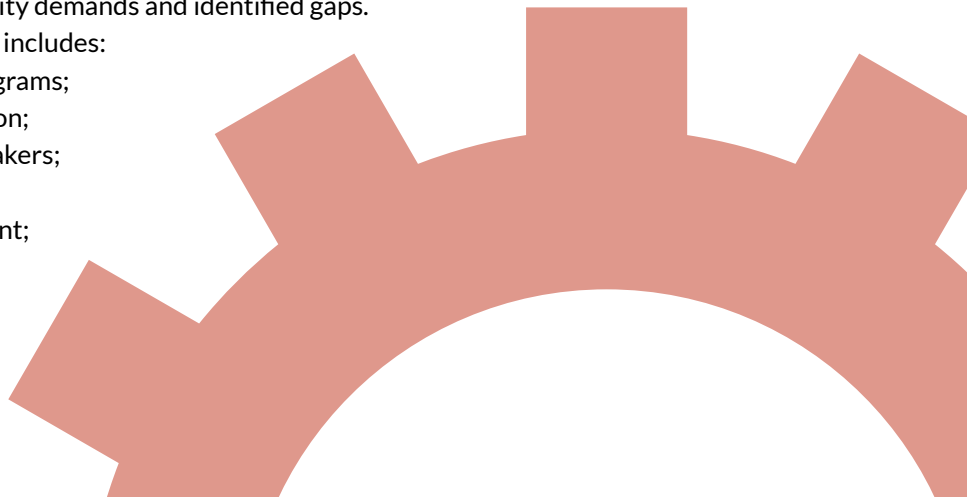
- » Action Team meetings
 - » The Action Team met three times. Discussions included research about intermediary practices, lessons learned from previous local intermediaries, types of intermediary functions, and characteristics for an effective intermediary.
 - » A total of 32 participants attended one or more meetings with average attendance of 17 people per meeting.
- » Focus Groups for Leaders of Small Youth-Serving Non-Profits
 - » Two focus groups involved discussions about services and supports needed to improve services, challenges specific to new and small organizations, and characteristics for effective support.
 - » A total of 15 non-profit leaders participated
- » Online Survey Distributed to 322 individuals
 - » Responses were received from 77 individuals who represented a diverse range of organizations by budget, staff size, and focus areas.
 - » Survey questions asked about needs for organizational and programmatic supports and technical assistance and preferred qualities for an intermediary or support organization.

Information gathered through Action Team discussions was often corroborated by results of the online survey data. One noted difference – smaller organizations requested supports such as help with IRS status, volunteer recruitment and training, and locating meeting space that were not as high priority for larger, more established organizations.

- » Organizations need and want additional supports to help them meet their goals.
- » Local organizations recognize the lack of such supports for New Orleans youth-serving organizations.
- » Participants identified a number of value-added functions belonging within the scope of an intermediary. These are consistent with national studies on intermediary structures.
- » Smaller organizations identified additional priorities for intermediary support, including meeting and activity space, assistance securing non-profit status, and volunteer recruitment and management.
- » There is growing consensus around the values, qualities, diversity, and capacity necessary for a New Orleans-based organization to be most effective in providing these supports.
- » It is improbable that any one organization will be able to deliver all the supports identified across the gamut of youth-serving organizations.

The facilitator for the Intermediary Support team reviewed best practice literature for intermediary and collective impact backbone organizations and identified the following characteristics:

- » Local intermediary organizations typically:
 - » Have modest operating budgets and small numbers of staff;
 - » Secure private and public revenue streams, including foundations, corporations, state and local governments, and in a few cases, membership dues; and
 - » Are created as a result of community demands and identified gaps.
- » Typical work by local intermediaries includes:
 - » Funding and overseeing grant programs;
 - » Conducting research and evaluation;
 - » Convening providers and policymakers;
 - » Disseminating knowledge;
 - » Providing professional development;
 - » Raising money; and
 - » Influencing policy.





DATA AND INFORMATION TEAM PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Aesha Rasheed was the facilitator for the Data and Information Team.

- » The Team met one time and recommended not re-convening the group. Rather, the facilitator proposed compiling a catalog of youth-related data sources. This can be found on the YouthShift website.
- » It was also recommended that the new intermediary entity secure resources to update the catalog as needed and make it accessible to multiple audiences on a regular basis.

POLICY TEAM PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Takema Robinson was the facilitator for the Policy Team.

- » YouthShift partners and survey respondents indicated a strong interest and need for youth policy information and advocacy. However, the task of effectively meeting these needs was deemed too great by the Action Team to complete in the given time frame.
- » The revised workplan for this team involved a long-time YouthShift partner, the Children and Youth Planning Board (CYPB), whereby the team facilitator would work with CYPB to develop their policy process and agenda. Created by Louisiana State Law with the charge of collecting information and coordinating efforts within a jurisdiction for children and youth, CYPB and its city council-appointed members are positioned as a locus for youth-focused policy strategies. More information about CYPB is available on their website.

What's Next?

In September 2016, the YouthShift Steering Committee members reviewed the Action Team's final reports. The committee members acknowledged the hard work and contributions from team members and applauded the thoughtful recommendations that build on YouthShift's previous work.

The Engagement and Inclusion, Program Quality, and Intermediary Support Action Teams have all posted documents that outline their final recommendations. These documents also include research and data that was reviewed, in-depth summaries of the conversations held, and a list of the Action Team participants. To view these reports, please see links on the YouthShift website.

[Engagement and Inclusion Action Team Report](#)

[Program Support Action Team Report](#)

[Intermediary Support Action Team Report](#)



Leadership for implementing the recommended work – including partnering with others-- now falls to the new intermediary entity that will be created based on the Intermediary Support Team’s recommendations and criteria. Informed by YouthShift’s several years of engagement, research, and conversation, this new entity will be well informed on the desires and priorities of youth-serving community members and leaders in New Orleans. The collective YouthShift community will continue to lift up the important assets and critical needs of young people in our communities, and hold this new entity accountable for improving the conditions that make it possible for all children and youth to thrive and grow.

The resources and recommendations created under YouthShift, including Action Team recommendations, as well as future updates are available via the YouthShift website at www.nolayouthshift.org.





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