

# GENERATION TRANSFORMATION

## Resourcing Transformative Youth Organizing & Community Resilience

PUBLISHED BY THE FORD FOUNDATION AND  
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## The Next Generation Fund

The current era is marked by social movements and networks of remarkable scale and impact. The transformation they create is fast and widespread.

The Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, Occupy, gun violence prevention, and the immigrant rights movements are all largely led by young people—more specifically youth of color, young women, immigrant and queer youth. They are a generation born into a time of profound transformation and struggle for justice. They are not a generation that can punt or defer the work to the next. The crises of our times demand their leadership, from such a young age. And, now they are the generation fighting for these changes with massive systems of climate change, global pandemic and protracted violence embedded in White Supremacy. Within the current cultural and political climate, young organizers are increasingly targets of physical and online attacks. More broadly, the impact of the impending depression and soaring unemployment rates will only compound financial insecurity for a generation already burdened with historic amounts of student and other debt. It will cut off educational and career paths for so many. Amidst this climate, young leaders and youth-led organizations are integrating approaches that focus on resilience, healing and the transformative power of organizing and community building. Millennials and Gen Z remain important drivers of social change particularly in the realm of “big ideas” such as defunding the police to make way for more resilient communities, Medicare for all, sector wide workplace reforms, and calls for extensive expansion of access to the polls. Such efforts may now be more politically palatable but will not be actualized absent strong leaders and viable organizations.

**This is an invitation to other funders to  
join us on this learning journey, and to  
invest in generation transformation ...**

Launched in December 2018, the Next Generation Fund (the Next Gen Fund or the Fund) is a response to a growing call from frontline organizers and leaders and a desire as funders to learn from such restorative and transformative practices in order to support a rising generation of social justice leaders and nurture sustainable approaches to organizing and community building.

The Fund is anchored by the Ford Foundation and developed in partnership with the Movement Strategy Center’s Innovation Center.

The Fund seeks to support youth organizers and activists building towards a world of regeneration and resilience. We have learned from our partners that investing in spiritual, emotional and cultural roots can ground people, creating radical, often new connections

and new possibilities for transformation. These connections and relationships allow for the conditions to build power that actually transform systems and culture. The groups at the heart of this fund feel that healing and replenishing our relationships to one another is foundational and a necessary stepping-stone in the ability to transform systems.

## **“If we’re telling everybody else to invest in youth, *how are we investing in our young people?*”**

Bianca Gomez\*

Another core tenet of this fund is the necessary belief in the power of young people. The leadership and experience of young people organizing with communities most impacted by systemic inequality—including communities of color, immigrants, women, and LGBTQ people—is not only vital to shifting power at scale and building it in deep and sustainable ways for the long haul but also to good management of community wealth and funds. Young people bring new perspectives to confronting the very systems that inflict deep and often generational trauma on them and their communities, offering up radical new forms of governance that center healing and for whole communities. The Fund aims to learn from and support approaches where organizing itself is a restorative resilient and transformative practice.

The Next Gen Fund is a cohort-based grantmaking and learning initiative at the intersection of youth, social change, resilience and healing. This fund is rooted in the belief that transformative organizing practices are integral to supporting young leaders, advancing social change, and developing sustainable organizations.

### **Transformative Organizing Contains 5 Core Elements:**

1. It is grounded in youth or multigenerational base-building strategies, connecting power across a broad set of people within communities;
2. Through leadership development, it applies and builds skills;
3. It embodies systems change campaigns, trying to shift the broader conditions toward community liberation and self-determination;
4. It centers movement building as core to connecting a broader set of communities and issues.
5. Personal transformation, healing and growth is what allows for its resilience and it is here that we are most interested in exploring how practices around healing and resilience deepen organizational models, create bolder visions with stronger (and even unlikely partnerships) leading to more effective social change, at scale, led by, for and with young people and their communities.

In 2018, the Next Gen Fund provided one-year grants to youth-led or youth-centered organizations and individuals engaging in restorative practice and transformative organizing as part of their work. We sought out to learn about a range of resilience practices including but not limited to:

- traditional practices indigenous to the people and communities in which young people live and organize;
- social justice-framed social and mental health services;
- contemplative and holistic practices incorporated from a variety of lineages;
- restorative justice models;
- new, and experimental forms of healing and restoration.

In 2020 we will be providing renewal grants to the existing cohort, composed of the original 21 organizing groups and 10 additional intermediary (3 donor intermediaries and 7 practitioners) organizations that form a second cohort of the Fund.

This cohort will consist of donor intermediaries and practitioners. We believe that in order to expand our impact beyond the 21 groups this fund resources, we need to partner and invest in the infrastructure that supports the strengthening and sustaining of youth organizing.

**“Addressing and working with trauma builds power by creating a more holistic, more audacious vision and builds a strengthened individual and collective agency which is core to community organizing. This is what is ‘transformative’ and what ‘builds resilience.’ ”**

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## Responsive Design

In April 2018 the Next Gen team circulated a letter of intent and within less than six weeks over 400 organizations across the country responded. The team reviewed, assessed and synthesized the submission to learn and better understand what social movements are grappling with today and what role resilience and healing practice is taking, if at all. The call was resounding—there is a wealth of information at the intersection of healing practice, young people and social movements, and a reverb to invest in the health, safety and well-being of young leaders.

**“Transformative justice takes a long time. Learning and decolonizing takes a long time.”**

Bianca Gomez\*

If we had the resources, we would have sought to fund the whole field. But we had to narrow it down.

The process of building the Next Gen Fund involved experimental edges that blended traditional philanthropic practices with social justice approaches. From 400 submissions, the team landed on 200 organizations that were working across a spectrum of experimental to anchored practices, all centering young people of color—poor, queer, immigrant and in many other ways representative of those most impacted by social inequity. (There is a list of the “NextGen 150” on the last page of this brief.\*\*)

As they moved toward what would be a typical Request for Proposals process, the team listened to the field and took their own experiences to bear on how they could use the RFP process to recognize the expertise of the field and reduce the burden on them in proposal writing—one of the forms of trauma named in the LOI process! They decided that instead of asking the groups to write another proposal, they would conduct interviews. The Fund provided the option to groups to participate in a conversation with in lieu of a traditional proposal—a position unanimously accepted by 60+ organizations that participated in the “RFP” phase. Further, recognizing the value of their time, experience and knowledge the Fund offered all groups a small honorarium to participate, which was appreciated as an uncommon new practice in philanthropy and demonstrated that the Fund valued their time and expertise. As a result of this RFP methodology, the team designed the Fund to at least provide the option to all grantees for oral reporting.

We went through a very difficult and principled process of selecting 21 organizations to kick-start the Next Gen Fund, acknowledging that there were many organizations that had applied that were carrying out great work. Working closely with the Next Gen team at MSC and Ford, and moving at the speed of trust, the cohort was designed to

represent a mix of organizations representing a variety of healing practices at various depth—some groups who are just experimenting with practice, others who feel like they are able to take off the mask and let their practices be in the open and still others who have openly anchored healing practices in their model and work but who have never quite received the funding for it. We are proud that the cohort is grounded in frontline community work with queer, immigrant, women of color led leadership. The Next Gen team has been in deep conversation with these 21 organizations since the launch of the fund in late 2018. Here is some of what we learned from this entire process about the moment we are in, the paramount importance of healing and resilience to social change and the vital role of young people in making this happen.

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## More than a moment

Social movements of our time are powerfully centering on the great transition taking place—away from an economy and relationship with the environment that is based on depletion and scarcity and toward one that embraces and centers sustainability and abundance. Young people are at the center of working to advance transformative practice and transformative organizing and embracing it as vital to the particular moment we are living in. By 2020, the majority of this country's young people will be a people of color. In an era where White Supremacy is ardent, visual and visceral, young people and their communities are holding the line on the future which is theirs.

### Building Sustainable and Durable Power

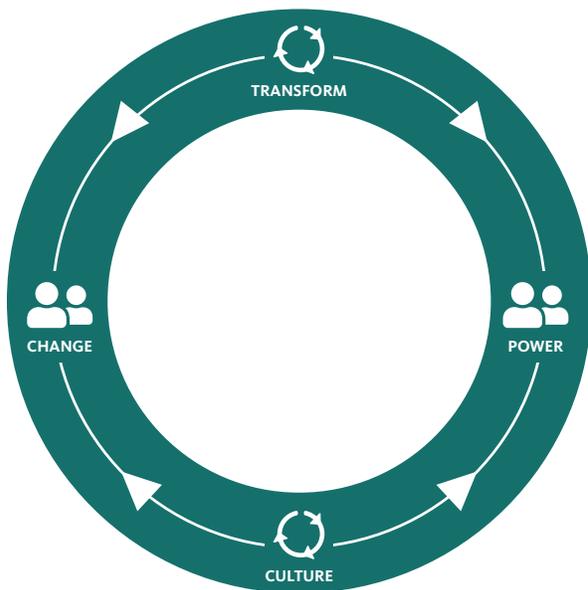
Social justice movements today are occupied by the question of healing to address the questions of how we build lasting change. How do we address that groups have been winning victories, but communities, and young people in particular, are still losing so much? How do we address that systems of accountability are nowhere to be found and lived/material conditions are worsening? Groups in the Next Gen Fund express that the experience of a win was like grabbing at straws and today it feels like that the systems of oppression are insurmountable.

Adopting and/or articulating healing practice as a needed element in organizing, as a means to truly transform people and systems has been embraced at various levels among the Next Gen cohort.

Oakland Kids First expressed a model depicted in the graphic representation here. They amplified what was shared in many of the conversations during this Next Gen Fund interview process:

Social change organizations are paying particular attention to trauma and its connection to resilience and transformation. At the core of what organizations are working on is healing individuals and the collective community from a variety of

traumas: those that emanate from macro and long-term systems of oppression (racism, misogyny, classism, etc.), those specific to a particular location, geography and community; and those specific to an individual’s experience in their own lives and in their community. Healing from trauma transforms individuals into more strategic leaders who, by growing their capacity to be grounded, can create buckets for broader, bigger visions, making agendas unthought of before and connecting people who would not always be connected in the past. Grounded leadership is required to be visionary.



The healing trauma spaces created in organizations at some point become spaces for building truly viable and deep systems change campaigns and strategies. The starting point for the type of visioning work as well as the relational aspects of developing strategy have been transformed by going to the depths of practice and healing. For example, groups working on school discipline campaigns shared how their revived strategy space allowed for them to bring together communities, school leadership, teachers, the

police and others to identify and mete out solutions through healing practice. These were actors who previously would not have assembled to address these problems in the past. They were often actors entrapped in creating cycles of oppression for each other.

Addressing and working with trauma builds power by creating a more holistic, more audacious vision and builds a strengthened individual and collective agency which is core to community organizing. This is what is “transformative” and what “builds resilience.

**United We Dream (UWD)** mobilized hundreds of youth to Florida’s state capital in response to the State adopting harsh anti-immigrant policies including enforcing Florida as a No Sanctuary state. This means, for example, Local law enforcement are mandated to follow federal immigration guidelines; someone pulled over for a routine traffic stop could be detained and deported. In response to the Dreamers actions in Tallahassee, the President of the Florida Senate, Bill Galvano, responded by saying, “Go home and tell your parents they shouldn’t have crossed the border illegally, so you wouldn’t be living in fear.” Reading the news, it doesn’t take much to see how this country’s rhetoric, policies, and actions are unleashing violence on immigrant communities, leading to great despair for the organizations like UWD who have been fighting to protect their communities for more than a decade-long fight. UWD has shared the tragic stories of members taking their

own lives and the deep traumatic scars that generations of oppression leaves behind. The re-strategizing and galvanizing of the base in the face of reactions from “leaders” the likes of Galvano could be destabilizing, but rather, UWD chose to go back and huddle with their staff and members, embrace their restorative practice of what they call “undocuhealing” as a means of facing into the traumas and using tools to bring healing to their membership base. UWD’s example highlights that when healing can happen, new vision and strategies emerge.

## “How are you reclaiming your humanity?”

Eli Cuna\*

### Naming Trauma and Vulnerability

Young people are calling for greater naming of the various traumas, historically situated in their communities and part of their present context. They move past the “jargon” of trauma to name specific and qualified incidents and actions that have caused them harm. The work, importantly, is intergenerational and we are particularly inspired by the lens through which gender and young people’s fluid identities have informed and shaped demands for change as well as practices of resilience. The naming of trauma and the various tactics to address it take into consideration individual and collective experiences, noting that healing both the individual and the collective (community, organization) is not only valuable but necessary to advancing visions for social change.

## “Whenever we provide a safe space for things to come out, it is the beginning of trauma being transformed. *Trauma not transformed is trauma transmitted.*”

Kawal Ulanday\*

In this era of greater backlash, where the experience of violence from a systematic to individual level has increased, it is not uncommon to hear the refrain among social justice actors that victories are fewer and farther between or that the work is but a drop in the bucket. Nevertheless, there have been extraordinary examples of big wins, one with the heartbeat of sustainability as a result of transformations among the base and in communities. We identified in this process that there is a reawakening of sustainable power building that is possible as a result of a focus on healing and resilience. Among groups that have made concerted investments in practice toward healing from trauma and building resilient members and communities, we hear about new and unlikely partnerships that have emerged—between conservative elders and their young people or with those once considered oppositional forces (the police)—to reimagine change and build strategies that ensure greater power for all. For instance,

Freedom Inc., who works with the Hmong immigrant community in Wisconsin, shared how intergenerational healing has happened between elders and LGBTQ youth. Unprecedented acceptance has strengthened and galvanized the community base. New understandings of political power across generations have emerged leading to new visions of deep power building.

**“As we’re talking about alternatives and reimagining the new world, it can’t just live in our heads—we have to practice it.”**

Zon Moua\*

The history of community-led change embraces models which integrate political power building with often hidden indigenous practices of building culture, spirituality and/or other aspects of connection and healing. Within Next Gen, there are groups engaging with healing practices that connect their young people to the orientation of organizing and power building, but they don’t necessarily name these practices as healing or use the terms trauma. Practices like indigenous art and culture, talking circles, sweat lodges are embedded in the organization’s structure. These groups expressed that these practices are not resourced by grantmaking and often are financially possible through relationships and in-kind donations. even when these practices are pulled out of their model, no one is paying for it. To have the resources needed to conduct this work specifically will allow groups to both elevate the practice as core to their model and (hopefully their successes) but also test, evaluate and shift these practices for the better.

**Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC)** found their way to a new organizational practice of restorative justice through addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. ROC supports the 6 million+—largely young people of color (and largely women) who comprise the majority of the restaurant service industry. When they first approached their base of women to ask them how they experienced sexual harassment their inquiry did not yield a lot of discussion. The term sexual harassment was a stopping point in the conversation either for reasons of internalized stigma or simply that it did not speak to the reality that women experienced in the restaurant industry.

Over time, ROC altered their approach to understand how sexual harassment was affecting their base. They started breaking down what sexual harassment was and began asking different questions of their base. For example has anyone ever touched you in [insert specific body part]? Has anyone ever called you [insert derogatory name]? How did that make you feel? How did that impact your work? How does that connect to your life?

While it seems basic, ROC was able to illuminate precisely what sexual harassment was—what it looked like, what it felt like and for a group of women who had

experienced it but could not name it; they now had the tools to begin identifying moments when someone attempted to strip their power from within the industry they were trying to organize. They began to connect their experience of this particular trauma and the ways in which the walls of denial were built through the experience of generational trauma—their mothers and their mothers' mothers experienced these very things, but no one had ever named it.

Today ROC is leading on key campaigns restoring dignity in the era of MeToo, including turning over ownership from bad actors who used sexual harassment as a tool to have power over workers, to worker-owned restaurants. As a result of their Next Gen grant, ROC has sought out expertise and learning on restorative justice models and how they could formalize this practice to serve their organizing infrastructure.

## Young People's Demands Are Shifting Organizing Models and Organizations

In building the Next Gen Fund, we noticed an evolution taking place in the youth organizing field to approaching change and organizing. Young people are rejecting a model that deals with trauma in unhealthy ways or not at all. One participant described the challenge with that model, “as the person in the institution, you are working on the same issues that have impacted you. There was never any space for how you deal with it. No spaces to access healing.”

**“Young leaders understand this world in a way that I don’t because they are living into a future I won’t inhabit. So my responsibility is to ask them: *What do you see and what do you need?*”**

Taj James\*

Young leaders in the cohort of the Fund center healing, and say it informs their strategy development and encourages deep culture shifts. Young people are leading the charge toward a transformational approach that honors traditions and leads the way to *a more just and fair future for all*. Youth organizers are demanding that the organizations they are a part of need to “be what we say and what we practice.” They are active leaders and actors in shifting the model. They are expressing that the old models of organizing where they are asked to “buck up” and not express trauma is over. They are demanding institutions feed their resilience and create spaces for rejuvenation. Young people’s agency has been core to the model shift.

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## Challenges

One of the basic conclusions of our learning thus far is, everyone, regardless of where they come from and what kind of disposable resources they have, deserves and needs the space to practice wellness. The need for leaders to identify and access such spaces is especially acute. Social movements are transforming their organizations and communities by using personal and collective healing and resilience practices. Understanding the true costs and benefits of healthy movements is a long overdue culture shift for philanthropy.

While there is an economic, social and cultural cost to implementing the health and wellness practices of the people we fund, there is also a cost to not investing in it. We risk burnout. We risk untenable movements. We risk social transformation. Healthy practices—cultural, traditional and clinical—are often the hidden costs of social change work. This puts leaders of social change organizations in a tough position. How can they fundraise around the impacts of the historical systems that they fight that create individual and community vulnerability? It also puts foundations in a tough position. How do they prove these types of costs are worth the investment?

These challenges pointed us to a need to be responsive and supportive in the design of the Next Gen Fund, to ensure we didn't over burden groups on top of all they are facing in the current moment, and to create a body of stories and narrative qualitative data that lays the groundwork for communicating impact.

The broader culture is recognizing the value of self-care practices as it relates to individual healing and wellness. Every day we see major media outlets espousing the benefits of mindfulness and rest to productivity and output. Corporations are providing their employees spaces within their offices for rest, mindfulness and play. While on the other end, social justice and nonprofit leaders have been focusing on the need for individual and collective healing to sustain their members, organizations and movements they lead for decades. Healing work that has often gone unfunded and made financially possible but unsustainable through relationships and in-kind donations. To have the resources needed to conduct this work specifically will allow groups to both elevate the practice as core to their model and (hopefully their successes) but also test, evaluate and shift these practices for the better.

We know that many social change fields are under-resourced and constrained due to lack of capital capacity, yet many groups are still prioritizing wellness practices into their work because they see it as a necessary way to support their people and reach their organizational goals. Understanding the true cost of supporting organizations and their missions holistically is what funding wellness practices is.

As stated above, people are at the heart of what make up social change organizations—the communities they serve, their members who are doing the work and the leaders

who are driving the vision for a Just world. We must holistically support organizations by supporting the wellness of the people and communities running them.

This is an invitation to other funders to join us on this learning journey, to answer the call where asked and where funders feel able to support this work, investing in wellness and healing practices within your existing grantmaking and/or through the Next Gen Fund for our most vital communities that are creating the change we seek and need today.

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**2019 Grantees:** Asian Pacific Environmental Network (Apen), Black Mesa Water Coalition, Black Youth Project 100 Education Fund, Chinese Progressive Association, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, Freedom Inc, Girls for Gender Equity, Khmer Girls in Action, Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance, Mekong NYC, Mujeres Unidas y Activas, Oakland Kids First, People Organizing to Demand Environmental & Economic Rights, Providence Youth Student Movement, Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, Inc., Ryse Center, SouthWest Organizing Project, Southwest Workers Union, Radical Monarchs, United We Dream Network Inc., YouthBuild USA/Youth on Board

**Intermediary grantees:** Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity, Forward Together, Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing, Generative Somatics, Groundswell Fund, Praxis Project, National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network, Native Organizers Alliance, Yo! Cali

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\*All quotations in this report that appear with an asterisk (\*) are taken from episodes of the *Healing Justice Podcast's Generation Transformation* series.

### **\*\*NextGen150**

**This is not an exhaustive list of all the youth-led or youth-centered organizing groups implementing healing practices in their work, but this is a list of the groups the Next Gen team reviewed thoroughly and would have funded if we had more resources.**

99 Rootz, Power California  
Alliance for Educational Justice  
Asian Pacific Environmental Network  
Black LGBTQIA+ Migrant Project  
Black Love Resists in the Rust/Just Resisting  
Black Mesa Water Coalition  
Black Youth Project 100 Education Fund  
Brave Heart Society  
Californians for Justice  
Carolina Youth Action Project  
Casa  
Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions  
Centro por la Justicia/Southwest Workers Union  
Chinese Progressive Association  
Climate Justice Alliance  
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (Chirla)  
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (Color)  
Communities for a Better Environment  
Communities United  
Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York  
El Pueblo  
Enlace  
Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement  
Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)

Fathers & Families of San Joaquin  
Freedom Inc.  
Gedakina  
Girls for Gender Equity  
Global Action Project  
Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence  
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Immigrant Youth Coalition  
Inner-City Muslim Action Network  
Jews For Racial & Economic Justice  
Jolt Initiative 501c3 and Jolt Action 501c4  
Juvenile Justice Coalition  
Khmer Girls in Action  
Kiwa (Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance)  
Logan Square Neighborhood Association  
Mujeres Unidas y Activas  
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (Nakasec)  
Native Justice Coalition  
Nollie Jenkins Family Center, Inc.  
Oakland Kids First  
One Colorado Education Fund  
OneAmerica  
Padres & Jóvenes Unidos  
People's Movement Center  
Philadelphia Student Union  
Poder  
Power U Center for Social Change  
Project Eko  
Prism and Alliance of RI Southeast Asians for Education  
Puente Human Rights Movement  
Racial Justice Action Center  
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC United)  
Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth  
Ryse Center  
Saokio Heritage  
Seeding Change  
SouthWest Organizing Project  
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)  
Radical Monarchs  
United for a Fair Economy  
United We Dream Network  
Universal Partnership  
Urban Youth Collaborative  
VietLead  
Whitney Richards-Calathes  
Women With A Vision, Inc.  
Young Women's Freedom Center  
Youth Justice Coalition & Power  
Youth Organize! California (a fiscally sponsored project of the Movement Strategy Center Innovation)  
Youth United for Change

Tenants and Workers United  
Youth Together  
Flourish Agenda, Inc.  
Gente Organizada  
Intertribal Food and Water Sovereignty Network  
Kuaaina Ulu Auamo  
Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability  
For Brown Bleeders  
GildaPapoose Collective  
Initiate Justice  
Inland Congregations United for Change  
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California  
Leaders Igniting Transformation  
#DignityInProcess  
1Hood Media  
ACT for Women and Girls  
Alaska Community Action on Toxics (Acat)  
APANO Communities United Fund  
Arkansas Public Policy Panel  
Asian Prisoner Support Committee  
Audre Lorde Project  
BATJC  
Birthmark Doula Collective  
Black Visions Collective  
Black Women's Blueprint  
Blackout Collective  
Brave Space Alliance  
Breakout  
Breath of My Heart Birthplace  
California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance  
Casa de Esperanza  
Center for Social Sustainable Systems (CESOSS)  
Centro Campesino  
Circles & Ciphers  
Dimensions Educational Consulting  
Diné Centered Research and Evaluation  
Dolores Huerta Foundation: Youth & Family Civic Engagement Initiative  
East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice  
EmpowerMT  
Erie Neighborhood House  
EveryBlackGirl, Inc.  
Exalt Youth (exalt)  
Florida Youth Shine  
Formerly Incarcerated Xingonas  
Fresno Barrios Unidos  
Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network  
Generation Justice  
Genesis  
Got Green  
Greensboro Mural Project

Heart Women & Girls  
Hill District Consensus Group  
Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network  
Kentucky Student Environmental Coalition  
La Plazita Institute Inc.  
Lisa Fager Bediako  
Make the Road  
Melissa Powless Chacon  
Momentum Alliance  
Mothers Opposed to Violence Everywhere  
NCbloc: Black University  
Nebraska Civic Engagement Table  
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice  
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice  
New York State Youth Leadership Council  
NJ Communities United  
Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition  
Ohio Student Association  
Organizing Neighborhoods for Equality: Northside  
Pa'lante Restorative Justice  
Pico California  
Pico Youth & Family Center  
Rockaway Youth Task Force  
Rooted in Community  
Sista Fire  
Youth Justice Milwaukee  
Youth Rise Texas