



DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION REPORT
A trek through the YouthScape landscape

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February, 2010

YouthScape

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YOUTHSCAPE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION REPORT
the landscape we walked and what we saw along the way

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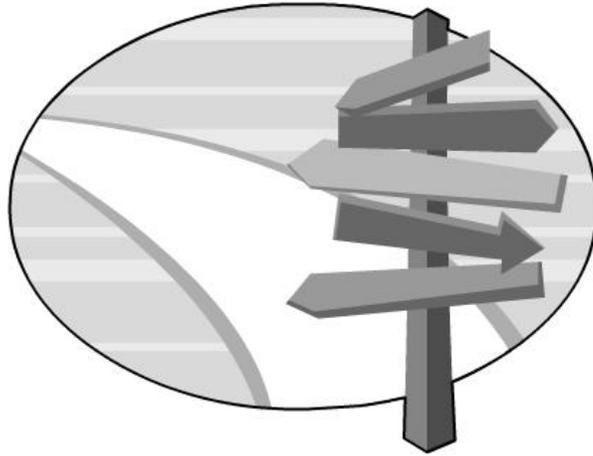
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A. Introduction

1. The tour

There are many paths one could take to explore the place known as YouthScape (YS). Each path has its own style of signage and distinct views. The walking tour through YS you are about to embark on follows along a path the locals have come to know as Developmental Evaluation. The tour provides the reader a different introduction to the community than what the average visitor tends to see. Developmental Evaluation winds through back alleys and climbs the highest hills for a better vantage point and even dips through a maze of underground tunnels to view the community's infrastructure. The tour stops along the way so you the reader, can better take in the sights and sounds at particular points of interest. This tour will be unlike others you may have taken but at the same time much of it will feel strangely familiar. The tour is designed to be respectful of the local citizens, even while offering those on the tour the opportunity to look over and into their own and others' back fences and windows. The tour provides the reader with a taste of YS's corners and common spaces. You will come to know YS for what it is – a group of people thrown together with a loose bond that like every community comes with its share of individual and family peculiarities. As communities go YS is young and like most new communities it has struggled to establish itself as a place of distinction for those that call it home, to share with visitors and for those that come to be served or sheltered by it.

In the spirit of service, this tour is offered with the hope that the pathway chosen provides useful insight into the important work that has taken place in building the place known as YS. As the Lead Developmental Evaluator, I offer this report in hope of stimulating discussions that may help all involved with this project to lay better paths in the future.

As lead tour guide with this report in hand, let me point out my significant bias. I have walked paths similar to YS for many years now. Some have been boring and forgettable, others full of life, and still others chock full of roots and rocks obstructing the way. Consequently, I believe the best laid paths through the

world of youth involvement are: a) those designed for youth and adults to walk together as partners; b) those that give both youth and adults a significant say in how the trip is run and where it goes; and c) those where the leaders know enough to give the 'trippers' the tools and know how to deal with things on their own when the going gets tough. Whether the points of interest along the way catch your interest or not, irritate you, cause you to pause and think, or excite you, I present this tour with all my biases and sincere intent of being in service.

2. A Brief Overview of Developmental Evaluation

This report is based on an extensive Developmental Evaluation of YS conducted by a team of five site-based evaluators and myself, Marc Langlois, the Lead Developmental Evaluator (DE). This group of six (with changing membership) learned and worked together in an effort to create a distinct application of Developmental Evaluation for each YS site. As Lead DE my attention has been focused on the overall energy and flow of the project. I have paid attention to things like national decision-making processes, group work, and structural implications. The DE team, by virtue of where team members directed their attention and what and how they shared their observations also played an intervening role in helping the project meet its objectives.

Standard evaluations go to great lengths to claim objectivity distancing the evaluator from the program. Development Evaluation on the other hand is a more inclusive approach with its first-hand incorporation of input and feedback from the program leaders and when appropriate, program participants. If done well the evaluator is considered part of the team learning alongside those directing and participating in the program. This unique positioning encourages the integration of the various components of good program development - planning, action and reflection. As a team member, the priority of the evaluator is to be a highly engaged and sensitive listener.

It is important to note that initiatives such as YS are well suited for this new type of evaluation. The standard summative and formative evaluation methods have their place but they're not up to the task of generating learning and direction at the pace required for complex initiatives where the outcomes, directions and processes are uncertain. Summative and formative evaluations are largely based on attaining and verifying a pre-determined logic model. Developmental Evaluation is designed to nurture developmental, emergent, innovative, and transformative processes. In his writing on Development Evaluation Jamie Gamble referred to the method as an "emerging hybrid of evaluation that is equipped to operate in conditions of uncertainty and supports rapidly moving program development" (Gamble, 2008). Michael Quinn Patton, a pioneer in Development Evaluation describes the method as a process that involves "asking evaluative questions and gathering information to provide feedback, and support developmental decision-making and course corrections along the emergent path (2006, pg. 2). The focus of a Development Evaluation is on the

people organizing a project, their processes and what they are learning as it unfolds.

There have been a number of situations during YS where having a DE present during critical meetings, events and conversations has significantly influenced the project's direction. As part of the project team a DE is able to ask up-close and sometimes difficult questions that may challenge assumptions and uncover ambiguity between intent, ideas and actions. It is this level of inquiry that has the potential to surface novel ideas, strategies and solutions. Ultimately the DEs' work is guided by an objective of program/project development.

What has also become important as part of the YS DE role, is to help steer attention away from 'what did not happen' and guide it towards celebrating 'what did'. If, as a result of this, the project's staff take the time to breathe really deeply and fully just once a week while holding the question, "What did we learn this week?" then that DE will have been a little more successful. It is at these times of reflection and inquiry that the soul of a project comes to the centre.

Summary of Developmental Evaluation Practices

(developed by the YouthScape Developmental Evaluators' Team)

- Support and generate learnings,
- Help to name and identify the target,
- Help to identify the goal and how to get there,
- Inform decisions,
- Encourage action,
- Identify the core elements of the initiative's work,
- Clarify ambiguity,
- Call to attention emergent situations,
- Conduct situational assessments,
- Support a balance between process and task,
- Facilitate the search for or offering of a solution,
- Provide feedback to support direction or affirm a shift,
- Encourage diverse perspectives,
- Challenge assumptions,
- Encourage and support strategy development,
- Share and collect information.

3. Points of Interest Along the Tour

Winding Roads and Back Alleys

pp. 16 - Had the concept of being “comprehensive” been better clarified with practical examples at each site, prior to it surfacing at the pre-launch meeting, then it may have been possible to avoid a great deal of project constipation.

pp. 17 - During the YS campaign the Lead DE sensed a lack of expertise in four particular areas of experience, knowledge and enabling relationships.

pp. 25 - Only one of the Convening Organizations demonstrated the confidence to lead a process that would identify a common purpose, map the systems concerned and engage those individuals and agencies that could take strategic action to accomplish the desired changes.

Peeking in Windows

pp. 22 - In the absence of a participatory group process, groups generally fall back to the usual formal and hierarchical methods of relating.

pp. 28 - It is important to question whether a better single organization capable of convening or acting as an intermediary of YS exists in Canada today.

pp. 21 - Though in most cases the Convening Organizations had some experience with convening others and/or collaborative processes, the majority had not done so for comprehensive community-based systems change and their level of experience with involving marginalized young people in such processes was thinner still.

pp. 34 - Every organization has structural elements that dictate the way in which people in the organization operate. The functions controlling planning and action are often central to the tension in organizations that attempt to involve young people.

Better Vantage Points

pp 16 & 65 - The system in which a change action is to take place must be clarified. Every organization has for example, various special initiatives, departments and groups. These are systems within systems; any one of them may be assessed as the appropriate target for change action. The determination of an ‘appropriate’ target could be based on an assessment of, for instance, its leadership, organizational culture and participatory structures.

pp. 45 - *Reflective Question:* What could be done differently with an RFP or other process, to encourage applicant agencies to do a deeper self-assessment of what systems change activity is already in motion at their agencies, and how to broaden those efforts with new allies, governance models and knowledge.

pp. 35 - *Reflective Question:* How has YS's formal structures, whether mandated or adopted, impacted the project's innovation?

pp. 36 - *Reflective Question:* Has the YS Coordinator's position inadvertently blocked the flow of information and relationship building?

pp. 40 - Together the evidence of the "The Youth Engagement in Rural Communities (YERC)" and YS regarding Steering Committees is compelling. As a result of their ineffectiveness 8 of 10 sites disbanded their Steering Committees with-in one year from the start of their projects.

pp. 42 - How might they (adult-based organizations) experience some of the benefits normally derived from the kind of democratic and cooperative principles used by many youth-led groups in their early stages?

pp. 44 - Should the decision on which and how deeply to assess a particular system's 'readiness' for a project such as YS be tied to the question of where the real power and influence on project decisions will lay.

Recommendations - for a 'Safer' Journey Next Time:

pp. 20 - That future projects identify the issue they are prepared to address and the various systems with which they will engage early in their process.

pp. 25 - That an organization being considered for a grant to convene an initiative have experience and knowledge with proven method(s) for engaging whole systems of people in organizations and communities in creating change.

pp. 26 - That funders grant to organizations interested in youth involvement that also have an ongoing change agenda in a particular system, and established relationships and knowledge in that system to help guide the change.

pp. 40 - Prior to formalizing a Steering Committee or other form of governance structure, it is recommended that those to be directly impacted by the project undertake a process of establishing a shared direction.

pp. 59 - Prior to starting a Developmental Evaluation those themes important to pay attention to and the authority associated with the role should be clarified.

pp. 69 - An independent and confidential evaluation tool to monitor the performance of a Lead DE and site-based DEs should be used in future projects of this nature. Such an evaluative tool could be introduced as part of the regular reporting from community sites.

Section B. The Program Context – changes to operating norms necessary

YS is a Comprehensive Community Initiative (CCI) based in five Canadian urban centers. The project's vision was to increase the resiliency of these communities by leveraging the capacity of marginalized young people in planning and implementing community development initiatives. Though most considered YS to predominantly be about youth engagement, it could equally be framed as the work of systems change, community organizing, community development, youth development, youth activism and organizational development. Ultimately the hope for YS has been that it would find innovative ways to create long lasting and meaningful change. YS is unique in Canada. The vision is bold, the work complex and the challenge significant. With its path forward seldom clear, conditions of emergence have come to be its norm.

A fast moving and emergent landscape are the norm for most youth engagement initiatives. Therefore a precursor to success for YS, as with any effort to meaningfully involve youth in community building, is that agencies in a convening role must re-invent at least part of their operations. This requires a willingness to reconsider traditional practice, structure and relationships (Camino, 2000; Zeldin, Petrokubi and MacNeil, 2008). There is often a gap between the need or necessity for re-invention and the willingness and ability of Convening Organizations to implement change. From its beginning YS has operated in this gap; more specifically, in the space between that which is proposed and on the ground engagement of young people in the work of system change. There are many layers of people, policies, practices and perspectives that exist between a decision to initiate a project and the putting of theory to practice.

Though most consider YS to predominantly be about youth engagement, it could equally be framed as the work of systems change, community organizing, community development, youth development, youth activism and organizational development.

A critical factor of YS success has been how well YS engages youth and adults in shared decision-making and community action. Jane Cooke Lauder, from her extensive research on community collaborations,

describes collaboration as "...not a process but a noisy, complex, unwieldy and unpredictable situation where the competing interests of different parties are always present, and where the resulting tensions and ambiguities need constant attention (2005)." Whether between a young person and a Project Coordinator, the local and national convening agencies, the evaluators and the community-based project staff, or any number of other working relationships, YS has been no exception to Cooke Lauder's observations.

The YS partners, conveners and funders embarked on the work of building YS with skill and commitment. The primary funder, The Foundation, (brought to the mix community grants and an extensive research and evaluation component. YS has been a valiant attempt by all involved to not only create conditions for

innovation with the work at hand, but, also to create sustainable change through structured reflection and dissemination.

Section C. The Innovation Landscape

1. Common Spaces

YS's potential resides in its bringing together of youth workers, youth leaders, administrators, young people and volunteers around a shared ideal – building resilient communities through youth engagement. The project has brought together the cultures of academics, researchers, youth, private foundations, seasoned and young adult youth-workers, evaluators, not-for-profits, activists, students, Aboriginals, Francophones, Anglophones, and more. Each individual involved in YS's leadership holds their own distinct role, language, practice and bias. It is the coming together times in 'common spaces' that represents YS's opportunity for co-creation, learning and innovation. It is also the space where DEs find fertile ground for their work.

Complex and difficult challenges were to be expected as part of YS. Overcoming the challenges required innovation and a quality of interaction between partners. In her important book on scaling up successful programs Lisbeth Schorr identified, "settings that encourage practitioners to build strong relationships, built on trust and respect" as a key contribution to successful programs (1997, p. 10). Evaluators of another Canadian CCI, Vibrant Communities, support this assertion, "It is these relationships and networks that enable the transmission of tacit knowledge and innovation" (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003). Collaborative and empowering group processes allow a group to effectively adapt to a fast changing environment. The building of strong common spaces is a precursor to success for any program attempting to be innovative.

It is the times of coming together into 'Common Spaces' that represents YS's opportunity for co-creation, learning and innovation.

The dynamics of common spaces can be variously difficult, exciting and at times exasperating. It is in the common spaces of emergent projects such as YS that conflict, problems, adaptation, innovation and solutions are likely to materialize. Misunderstandings in the common spaces should be expected. Though doing so complicated the initiative, YS did with various levels of success, bring together community partners. To pursue the YS vision with serious intent required a new way for the youth-serving organizations, community organizations, community leaders, and young people involved to talk, learn, plan and act together. The unique daily pressures each of these individuals and groups deal with do not go away just because there is an attempt to come together as a collaboration. Indeed, some would say that YS just became one more complexity to adapt to in their daily environment.

The YS common spaces occurred at different times and in various formats. There have been a number formalized at the level of the national YS organizers including the: funder, Executive Directors of the Convening Organizations, the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) - the National YS Convener, the staff at the community sites, the DEs and the Advisory Committee. The various formats have included conference call business meetings, face-to-face groups, one-on-one meetings, e-mail exchanges, community check-in calls, and field visits.

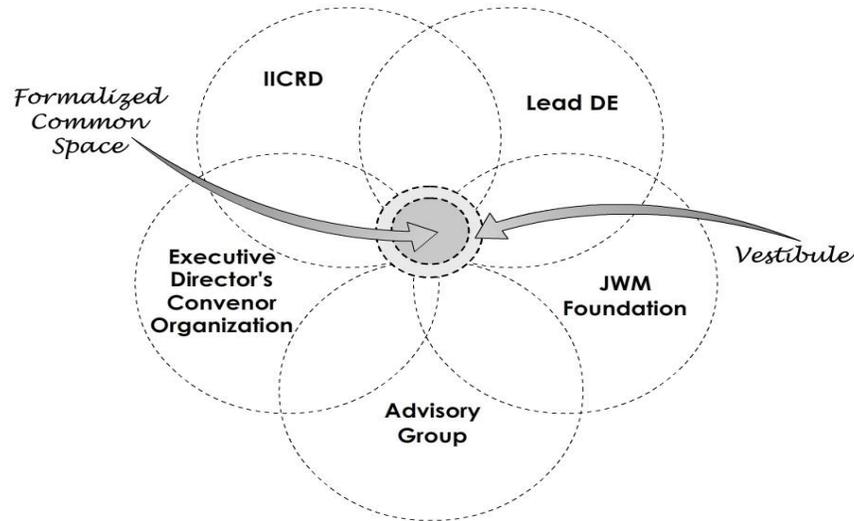


Figure #1 A depiction of YouthScape's formalized common space and its vestibules (informal common spaces) at the national level of the project.

At the community level, there were a number of interdependent but separate systems that also came together to create YS. The formalized common spaces have included: planned group meetings of Management Teams, Steering Committees and Grant Selection Committees, as well as ad hoc meetings and

gatherings with various combinations of those involved with YS at the sites.

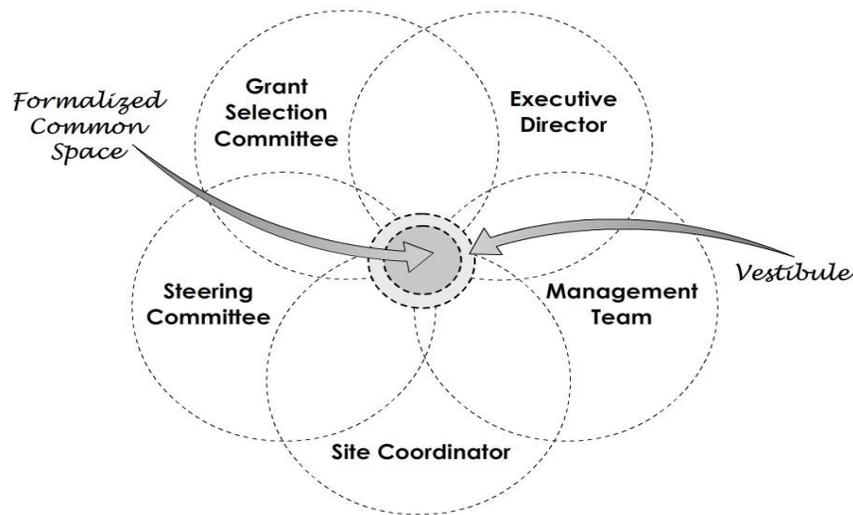


Figure #2 A depiction of YouthScape's formalized site-based common space and its vestibules (informal common spaces).

2. The Common Space Vestibules

Besides the formalized common spaces, there were and continue to be far more times when the 'coming together' was more informal - often with only two or three people. These times can be likened to waiting in a vestibule before entering someone's home, not quite in but not quite out either. In YS's vestibules you are part of the bigger structure but at the same time removed from watching eyes. The exchanges one might have in a vestibule can be quite different than inside the 'home.' With the relaxed formalities, positions of authority and language somehow don't seem to matter quite as much. You might have moments of exchange you may not have again once you get 'inside' and things become more formal. They might not always be pretty, nor seem productive but whether on Facebook, having coffee, or on the phone, the free flow of ideas in YS's vestibules should not be underestimated. Once you get inside the more formal common spaces the numbers of people and the potential mix of ideas and opinions may seem greater but the reality is things often get suppressed by packed agendas, loud and quiet voices, and under the surface dynamics. It is hard to get the best ideas and opinions out.

Whether the exchange was in a formalized large group common space or a more informal one shared by only a few, if people were careful to mind the differences in perspective and experiences, the opportunity to contribute to the overall success of YS was significant.

Two YS documents were created to help encourage a certain quality of interaction in the common spaces. At the outset of the project the Foundation tabled the document, "Guiding Principles for Engaging Youth" and later a

second complementary document drawn from the project's research, the "YS Guide Post" (Appendices A & B). These documents offered a set of principles with the intent of shaping the culture of interactions in YS's common spaces and with its external practices. As words on paper these documents alone are of little value to YS but when put into practice these principles were able to significantly influence the generative potential of a common space.

Section D. Discoveries

It has been a long tradition in Earth Education programs to encourage students to bring items they find particularly interesting (either the actual item or in picture form) to place in a 'Discovery Box' for sharing with others. The observations I share below are things I think are worth placing in the 'YS Discovery Box' for sharing with others. I refer to these as *discoveries* versus *findings* since they are not what most would call conclusive. They are though my carefully considered observations from repeated visits to my YS Listening Posts.

1. What it takes to be a Convening Organization

Getting off on the wrong comprehensive foot:

In its first year, questions about YS began to surface from all levels of the project such as: "What system are we focusing on? Where do we begin? What will bring everyone together? Who should we bring together? What is YS, an approach, an organization, or a project?" These are the same type of questions I, as the Lead DE found myself asking when I reviewed the original seven proposals from the short-listed applicant communities 3 years ago. What concerned me at that time and still rings true at this writing has the loose explanation of the concept of being 'comprehensive'. IICRD, the Foundation, and I too struggled with articulating a concept of 'comprehensive' that would successfully move the mandate of YS forward at the community sites. From the beginning the communities picked up on the vagueness of our interpretation of what comprehensive meant as they struggled to put practical strategies down on the ground. Looking back on the process, we now realize that the convening agencies carried this ambiguity into the work at their sites.

Had the concept of comprehensive been fully clarified and grounded in practical examples at each site when uncertainty first surfaced at the Sydney, B.C. pre-launch meeting, it may have been possible to avoid a great deal of project constipation. Having said that, it now seems the diversity of skills, knowledge and relationships required to address the YS vision was much broader than what was first articulated.

The challenge and the breadth of experience required:

The challenges of mobilizing citizens towards a common goal for the benefit of community building are no small task. Drawing together community groups and social service agencies to work on that same goal becomes still far more

complex. To introduce the element of working alongside private sector interests creates a whole new set of personal and professional dynamics. To then also hope to meaningfully involve marginalized young people in the process - well, that has rarely been accomplished.

As we look back on the project it is reasonable to question if any of the Convening Organizations initially had the right combination of experiences and knowledge to successfully reach beyond non-profit and social service agencies to engage citizens, associations, informal groups, institutions, private sector and marginalized young people towards a targeted systems change. The fact that in various ways and at various times YS called on the five Convening Organizations to employ practices, skills and processes that fell outside of their experiences and comfort zones illustrates this. However, it is commendable that some of the Convening Organizations have risen to the challenge and managed gradually to provide the level of leadership YS deserved. During the YS campaign the Lead DE sensed a lack of expertise in four particular areas of experience, knowledge and enabling relationships.

The convening organizations lacked sufficient:

- 1.1 knowledge and relationships within any particular system to be targeted for change action, or if they did they failed to leverage it;
- 1.2. knowledge, experience, and relationships to deeply understand the environments experienced by marginalized young people;
- 1.3. experience with creating common space between a group of collaborators, and partners;
- 1.4 experience and knowledge with the use of whole systems and high participation planning processes.

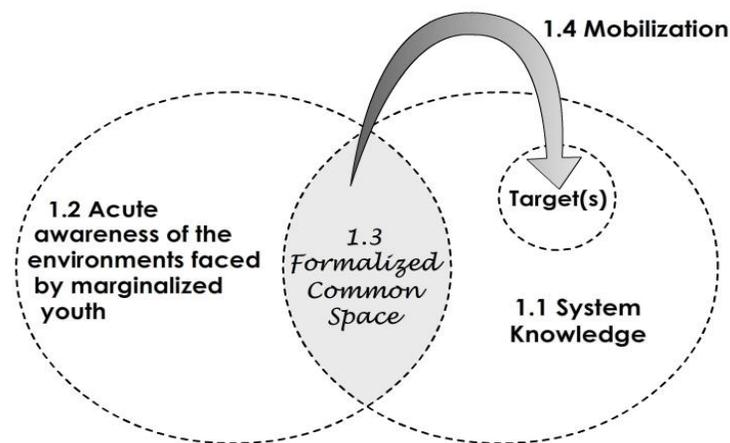


Figure # 3: A depiction of four themes of experience, knowledge and enabling relationships that may have been lacking in the YS project

The Guide Post (figure #4) that emerged from YS's research underscore the importance of the missing components of knowledge and experience listed above. The project principles depicted in figure #4 evolved from the YS community and the original Guiding Principles for Engaging Youth provided by the Foundation (Appendix A).



Figure #4 YS's Guide Post

For the more experienced of the YS Convening Organizations, had the missing skill sets and experience been identified prior to the project commencing, it is possible that the appropriate resource people could have been recruited to augment the organization's leadership. Alternatively, the role of their YS Coordinator or other YS site-based staff might have been created in such a way to complement the agency's existing skills.

1.1 The Convening Organizations lacked sufficient knowledge and relationships within any particular system to be targeted for change action, or if they did they failed to leverage it.

"We went into this systems change work without having an issue to coalesce around."

Site-based DE

The original vision of YS was to engage with a 'deep and broad slice' of the community. This vision called for mobilization strategies to go beyond working with the 'usual' community agencies - at most of the YS community sites this is where the collaborative work ended up occurring. Under the rubric of CCI the strategy options available to the conveners ranged from simple collaborations with other community service agencies on a specific issue to a full-scale cross-community mobilization. It was a significant side step from the original vision that most YS sites never seriously attempted to mobilize individuals or organizations

beyond the traditional boundary of community service agencies and institutions. In response to the original call for proposals by the Foundation candidate communities identified general themes that stretched across multiple disciplines of study, governance models and agencies. Various interim Steering Committees and multiple forums were proposed, all in the hopes of finding some shared issue(s) or direction(s) to sink their teeth into. What was lacking was coherent processes or plans for identifying common ground that people were ready to take action on and then growing the numbers and knowledge of those engaged in the systems change effort.

I recommend for future endeavors of this type that communities identify early in the process what issue they are prepared to address and the various systems that touch on the issue. Every organization has various special initiatives, departments and groups - systems within systems. The determination of an *appropriate* target to focus a change action on should be based on an assessment of factors such as its leadership, organizational culture, and participatory structures (these factors are discussed more in #5 of the Observations in this report and in the YS Handbook). In the case of a community youth engagement initiative the system chosen as the target for change could be focused on the diversity of participants in a sports program, exchanges with a municipal government on a public space policy, or communication systems between teachers and parents at a school. Identifying which system it is best to focus on allows the organizers to begin to identify (map) those individuals, policies, and practices that give the particular system its shape. It is the breadth of that mapping that presents a systems change initiative's choices for moving forward.

Only one of the YS Convening Organizations successfully gathered a group of diverse people that had interest, expertise and resources for action on a specific system. I'm reminded that while working at HeartWood (www.heartwood.ns.ca), it took us over 10 years to accomplish some reasonable level of two-way

...for future projects it seems well worth considering a strategy of simply throwing tinder on embers of systems change already well

dialogue about changing systems at the many multiple levels of youth-serving government agencies in Nova Scotia. It was ten years of difficult relationship building, trying to figure out the way they operate and think and finally, forming strategies and programs together.

Systems change work starts with relationship building. Relationship building creates the openings to understand the system you are hoping to change. I can't help but wonder what would have transpired if YS had recruited Convening Organizations already well invested in a particular systems change effort, or had a better assessment of what systems change initiatives were already well under way in the agencies that were chosen. In cases where YS did invest in existing actions and relationships at the Convening Organizations, the sense from the DEs is that impacts will be longer lasting and deeper. Based on these observations, for future projects it seems well worth considering a strategy of simply throwing tinder on embers of systems change already well established and then supporting the fire keepers, rather than looking for places to start fire.

It could be argued that in some of the sites there was an inordinate amount of time spent on trying to attract and keep marginalized youth showing up and too little time on creating a culture of hope, action and celebration that would attract and keep young people engaged. “Young people readily engage if there is an opportunity to connect with others, take action, contribute meaningfully and live their passions” (Warner, A. et. al., 2008). As one astute community partner pointed out in an interview, “Youth engagement is not the end it is a means. Would you get involved in something that was about *adult* engagement?”

There are numerous good examples of successful programs involving young people in community development that have put the compelling need or opportunity in the community first and let the youth engagement follow. It was in response to some of this evidence that motivated the Foundation to mandate the Convening Organizations to issue small grants directly to young people for community action.

Contrary to this strategy, the YS sites that struggled in the early stages were directing significant efforts at building governance structures and making attempts to recruit young people. It was hoped ideas and motivation for meaningful actions in the community would follow from this base of new relationships between youth and adults. This is, at best, a weak scenario. In YS, as with other youth engagement projects, it is not the engagement of youth in community action that is the particular challenge; rather it is getting adults in positions of authority to engage with them in shared and meaningful action.

Vague action themes and directions made it very difficult for some YS communities to organize towards any shared action.

Vague action themes and directions made it very difficult for some YS communities to organize towards any shared direction. One DE described the problem as there being, “a lot of little disconnected things.” Those that were able to successfully communicate their direction in the early stages celebrated with larger and more engaged community partners and youth. Without compelling action and a target for change front and centre, the task of attracting others to YS’s aims became very difficult at most sites.

Without a specific system change target the sites fell back on their more familiar practice of convening mostly those organizations that had experience working with, or had experience with marginalized young people. The vagueness at some sites created a circumstance such that those partners that did get involved in the early stages became overly dictated by the usual ways of operating within the Convening Organizations.

IICRD and the Foundation became uncomfortable with the level of inactivity in engaging youth and partners in the communities. Meanwhile, the majority of the YS sites were feeling short on direction and vulnerable. My sense is that this left

them sensitive to gratuitous input by the national project leadership. Communications with the sites became more sensitive while nudges by IICRD and the Foundation became more overt.

Recommendation: That future projects identify the issue they are prepared to address and the various systems they will engage with early in their process.

That funders consider a strategy of throwing tinder on embers of systems change already well established within convening organizations and then support the fire keepers, rather than looking for places to start fires.

1.2 The Convening Organizations lacked sufficient knowledge, experience and relationships to deeply understand the environments experienced by marginalized young people.

“At the June meeting when communities came together, it was identified that the end goal was changing reflexes – but whose reflexes?”

Site-based DE

Given YS's mandate to work with marginalized young people, it would have helped if the Convening Organization had a pre-established network with this population and agencies that serve it. The majority of the Convening Organizations were without established relationships with the target group or in some cases the agencies that serve them. The DE from one site shared this perspective, “They [the Convening Organization] have never been able to engage the kind of youth they are supposed to be engaging in YS.” Unfortunately in almost all cases the Convening Organizations had their work cut out for them just changing their own operational reflexes to engage with marginalized young people, let alone lead an initiative that encouraged others to do the same.

It has been suggested by some YS observers that training on youth engagement practices with marginalized young people would have improved the capacity of the conveners to do the job at hand. I doubt this would have made significant difference. Training is only the tip of the iceberg on preparing an agency to appreciate the realities of being marginalized as a young person. Therefore, if training for future projects of this type is to occur it is recommended that it be completed prior to the project's commencement.

1.3 The Convening Organizations lacked sufficient experience with creating common space between a group of collaborators, and partners.

“The efforts we refer to as community building – the building of and cultivation of relationships are severely undervalued and underfunded” [Leiterman and Stillman, 1993: 68].

In the absence of a participatory group process, groups generally fall back to the usual formal and hierarchical methods of relating. In YS at the staff and

committee level as well as between the sites and the Convening Organizations this method of relating has, in my opinion, restricted generative exchanges at a one-on-one and group level. This dynamic is particularly limiting when one considers the mandate of YS to be the engagement *with* not *for* marginalized youth. The opportunity for a youth and adult

When formal and role dictated methods of communicating take over, the tendency is to fall back into the usual ways that youth and adults relate.

partnership takes a back seat when those in roles of authority shape the exchanges and the output. It was as if there were uncertain traffic cops at the YS intersections with few road signs and lots of unexpected traffic coming. For fear of accidents the safe route seemed to be to direct traffic to parking lots and the usual thoroughfares. If both drivers and the

traffic cop are clear of their options it is amazing how much smoother traffic can flow at a busy intersection.

The idea of building a generative and empowering culture within YS's common spaces is represented in the new document, "YS Premises for Social Change" under the headings of "Value Diversity", and "Nurture a Learning Community" (forthcoming in YS Handbook). This "Premises for Social Change" document was created by the YS researcher in this, the last year of the project and drew from the original Principles for Youth Engagement introduced by the Foundation at the outset of YS, and the Guide Post document created by the Lead Researcher from data drawn from the community sites. Since the success of emergent and complex projects always comes back to the principles the project is practicing, these documents had the potential of being of great importance to YS. The documents themselves, of course, are not and were not enough. If the principles promoted by these documents were not being practiced in the Convening Organizations prior to YS, having them on paper as a way of being a part of YS was not likely to have influenced their organizational behavior to any significant degree.

Wisely in the 'YS Request For Proposals' (RFP) IICRD asked the question: "What will be your approach to link and engage the diverse partners to work as a team?" Though this was an important question, based upon my own review of the proposals it was not satisfactorily answered. The question may have been unsatisfactorily answered because team functioning is generally undervalued in practice. Building a team culture is not something you do at the beginning of an initiative and then move on never to re-visit the objective again. Unfortunately tensions at many levels of the project overwhelmed the possibilities for early national success. To be generative, at the very least an initiative must welcome alternative views. Unfortunately, during YS's first National Gathering when a brave minority publicly presented alternative perspectives, they felt neither welcomed nor 'safe' - the project's ability to engage diverse partners may have been at that point in time, inadequate.

There are many levels at which activity that effects systems change must take place, each with their own distinct characteristics. What young people and senior professionals see and whom they network with are different and equally

complex. The lack of success the Convening Organizations encountered as a result of their use of traditional internal group processes extended to their practices with community partners. Three of the original five Convening Organizations had their credibility as a convener for YS questioned by community partners. They were significantly challenged in their effort to bring together other community agencies, let alone do it in any sort of generative fashion. These circumstances made it very difficult to even begin the process of building collective purpose.

DEs from these sites reported well into the second year, "Partners that were at the table have become disengaged. They [the Convening Organization] at this point are on their own." Another DE reported that at their site, "People are talking about damage control. There are few bridges that have been made." The DEs responded at this time in ways that introduced more democratic planning processes to foster collective purpose, sometimes with the aid of a SAS generated tool and other times simply by taking on a facilitation role of strategic Common Spaces. In early communication from the Foundation to the sites they welcomed, even encouraged project sites to consider having a community facilitator for the initial process to shape the design and submit the proposal, and a different convener later on to manage the process. In retrospect it appears some of the sites would have benefited from picking up on this idea of an external facilitator.

There have been a significant number of seasoned professionals involved with YS and its predecessor "Growing Up in Cities". In the role as Lead DE, I regret that I did little to encourage creating a time to gather with this resource pool. Had members of the advisory committee, program staff at the Foundation, EDs of the Convening Organizations and associates in the field gathered solely for the purpose of a learning exchange, the value added to YS and the field would have been significant. Just as it is becoming more common practice in the youth engagement field to encourage youth-led activity by gathering young leaders, it is equally important to seize every opportunity to gather elders of youth engagement work in Canada. This group, as a result of doing their work for many years and the positions they hold, has a unique perspective and opportunity to impact the youth engagement domain and its approach to systems change.

The lack of building dynamic Common Spaces is particularly ironic as doing so underlies one of the most central principles of YS and the youth engagement movement in general - the appreciation of what young people offer when they find their place as leaders in community building processes. The simple truth is that when you involve youth as decision makers it brings something very necessary to group and community processes. Youth operate differently than adult groups; they see different things and imagine different possibilities. When involved in meaningful ways in an organization youth will focus on relationship building, vision and organizational values more so than adults (Zeldin, 2000). Putting the principle of youth leadership into practice carries the potential of helping people and organizations, and communities connect, hope, and care (Burgess, 2000; Cervone 2002; Putnam, p. 21; Warner et al.; Zeldin, 2000) It stands

to reason that having more youth leadership within YS would have resulted in more dynamic and generative common spaces.

1.4 The Convening Organizations lacked sufficient experience and knowledge with the use of whole systems and high participation planning processes.

“Going into this project we didn’t have a well developed understanding/model of systems change. “We can have a strong vision that humans should be able to fly, but we need a good understanding of the different systems that must work together to achieve that. I don’t think we have developed a substantiated model.”

Site-based DE

Since the first meeting with the short-listed communities at the Swan Hotel in Victoria, IICRD, the Foundation and the Lead DE made a concerted effort to communicate the concept of ‘comprehensive’ as being representative of a ‘deep slice’ of the community not necessarily a broad one. Regardless of this effort as I have said earlier, there were still those that struggled with the concept. One key player at a site reflected back on her first year in the project, “I had no idea what comprehensive meant.”

A YS design phase proposed and funded by the Foundation at the beginning of the project, called for a community facilitation processes to identify a theme that a critical mass of people care about and are prepared to take action around. What we now know is that the majority of the Convening Organizations lacked the knowledge and experience with proven processes to convene a group for comprehensive action. Therefore it is not surprising that most sites followed the usual approach of collaborating only with other community service agencies. In some of the sites, even this degree of collaboration was limited to a small number of other agencies. Consequently, what did not materialize in any significant way at the sites is the involvement of community associations, individual citizens, small business and corporate groups. Vague system change targets and unclear entry points have hampered recruiting other community players to get involved.

Only one of the Convening Organizations demonstrated the confidence to lead a process that would identify a common purpose, map the systems concerned, and engage those individuals and agencies that could take strategic action to accomplish the desired changes. Focusing in on what people are concerned with and what strategic actions can be taken is a primary first step in community organizing. Focusing in and then strategically organizing for comprehensive change on a particular system has not been a practice that has surfaced as part of the YS initiative. At a number of the sites their attempts to focus in on particular systems for change were interrupted for the entire first half of the project. In these cases there were organizational obstacles in their own organizations to deal with. However, it needs to be noted that the time spent to manage organizational change to deepen the organizations youth inclusion and engagement services were necessary albeit unexpected, foundational steps.

At a time when others were gathering around them for help on wrapped their heads around what to them was a complicated and ambiguous project, it was incumbent upon the Convening Organizations to step up with some solid leadership. As one DE reported, “the comprehensive intent of YS is compromised because they [the Convening Organization] do not have the capacity to hit the ground running. Without the Convening Organization leading a group process that built collective vision in the community sites, YS developed an identity problem in the majority of the sites. People in the sites began to wonder if YS was an approach, an organization, or a project? One DE commented that in their community, “Time has been needed to create the identity of YS; the new kid on the block has to be proven, gain credibility.” If a collective visioning process had been conducted early on in the sites, the participants themselves would have defined the project’s identity.

There are time tested processes of whole system planning that range from the popular Open Space design to Search Conferencing (Devane and Holman, 2008) that can dramatically increase the channels of communication and understanding in a group. These methods help establish a broader footprint in the community for a convening agency and significantly improve a group’s ability to seek solutions together. Sharing an action that addresses a community need and enlist someone’s passion can significantly enhance the generative and participatory qualities of a project. As such, YS’s youth-led grant parameter was an appropriate strategy. In the work of youth engagement an action in service to others tends to pull the focus away from the youth/adult dichotomy. Organized action focused on a specified systems change target also provides a natural boundary for mobilizing and organizing community.

Recommendation: That an organization being considered for a grant to convene an initiative, have experience and knowledge with proven method(s) for engaging whole systems of people in organizations and communities to create change.

Recommendation: That funders grant to organizations interested in youth involvement that also have an ongoing change agenda in a particular system, and established relationships and knowledge in that system to help guide the change.

2. The Function of the National Intermediary

As the Lead DE, I watched and participated for 1.5 years as the community sites reached out for clarity and clear answers to questions the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) team were in many cases hearing for the first time. Meanwhile, the community sites were being asked to adapt to changing ways of communicating, reporting and collecting information. To complete the picture we must also bring in the strange bedfellows of research and marginalized young people, Francophone and English speakers, funders

and practitioners and an age range from 14 - 60. Change work in human systems is complex with high potential for learning and innovation. The role of an Intermediary in this mix is a key component. In describing the ideal exchange between agency and client, Robert Greenleaf, says "the first order of business is to build a group of people who, under the influence of the institution, grow taller and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous" (1970, 30). IICRD task was to build a strong and autonomous YS community of practice from the participating organizations and individuals and to engage them together in the vision and mandate of YS. They had their work cut out for them. The section that follows documents observations and ideas about the role of being an Intermediary, using examples from the role assumed by IICRD.

IICRD played a significant role in shaping YS. At various times the role of being the Intermediary for YS required IICRD to coach, train and facilitate. At times IICRD's role called for following tightly the mandate the Foundation had created for YS, at other times there was room to negotiate parameters and co-create and still others when delegation or simply coaching was called for. To maximize engagement in a common space is to craft interventions in such a manner that the core of what a group is truly searching for and what a funder is mandating is made explicit and acted upon.

Throughout the process, IICRD has had to adjust their actions to best serve what the YS community searched for at any given time within the mandate of the project. The role calls for highly effective use of Situational Leadership (1969, Hersey & Blanchard). That is, understanding what level of guidance, authority, and encouragement is called for at any particular time in any particular situation. As initiatives evolve the role of the intermediary and the corresponding

<p>Welcome and entertain them all!</p> <p>Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably.</p> <p>He may be clearing you out for some new delight.</p> <p>The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.</p> <p>Be grateful for whatever comes because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.</p> <p>Excerpt from Rumi's poem, The Guest House.</p>	<p>skills necessary may change. The challenge in this for an Intermediary is twofold. First, there is the constant monitoring. In particular, in emergent CCI a group's own development along with changes to its environment impacts how an Intermediary must respond. Secondly, more often than not what a group is searching for will not be explicit.</p>
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An effective Intermediary knows that to suppress what naturally emerges from a group will come back to bite them sooner or later, and ultimately slow the group's progress. Rumi's poem instructs the Intervener to "treat each guest honorably even if they are a crowd of sorrows who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture." During YS's early periods of tension IICRD continued to

move forward initiating various and numerous efforts at 'truth and reconciliation' ranging from one-on-one conversations to group phone conversations. Gradually inching along trench-by-trench, sufficient common space was created to begin the process of addressing the more tangible actions of the project mandate. This was difficult yet necessary work if the project was to move forward. As Rumi points out in his poem, "He may be clearing you out for some new delight."

2.1 Facilitating the YS Learning Community

The objective of developing a national YS learning community remained a challenge for the first two years of the project, and began to bear fruit in the final year. There are some in the project that argue that the competitive nature of having all short-listed sites at the pre-launch Swan Hotel gathering set up a tone of competition between the sites that was difficult to recover from. IICRD had a number of other early storms to manage and on a number of occasions, wide gaps between expectations and demands. There was also the *perception* of conflicting messages from funders, getting familiar with the Convening Organizations skill set and the sites having an unclear understanding of the project mandate. In order to encourage team building across sites and with IICRD, the Program Officer from the Foundation was not included in the opening event in Sydney, BC. Looking back I cannot help but wonder if the Program Officer had participated at this time when clarity was of paramount importance, what ensuing ambiguity might have been avoided.

YS has taken a number of the Convening Organizations and Partners out of their comfort zone, which brings with it fears and turbulences; all necessary to get through transformations and to innovate but never-the-less difficult. During those weary times at YS, instead of turning to the YS community and the IICRD project staff for support and leadership, the Convening Organizations more often than not stayed in their silos and turned their discomforts on those they considered responsible for the condition: IICRD and the Foundation.

As the Intermediary, IICRD was in an awkward place of being in-between the funder and the grantees. It is reasonable to associate some impact from this positioning on their ability to facilitate the learning community. One community partner shared this observation, "I think one of the issues with IICRD is that they played a dual role, they were helping McConnell make the funding decisions and they were supposed to be a support to the community. Those roles don't necessarily go well together and it definitely didn't work in this case. Site visits seemed more like the site visits that a funder would make, to determine if all was going well and funding was in the right place, rather than a coaching/supporting/partnering visit. I don't think anyone could do this dual role, unless they were already in the community and had previous positive relationships/reputation."

Ultimately the role of a national Intermediary for a CCI is to facilitate the creation

of conditions that encourage innovation while being that safe harbor for those going through the stress of change. IICRD provided this support to the best of their ability. I have observed that IICRD is quite comfortable in creating the necessary conditions for building a learning community in their Child Rights in practice bi-annual events. They can play it very well. However, it is my opinion, based on interviews and being privy to conversations in the project's 'vestibules', that from the perspective of the Community Sites, IICRD did not achieve the level of credibility necessary to inspire and build a generative learning community in the first two years of the project. However, with staff changes, improved reporting, and clarity on small granting, things did improve significantly in YS's final year.

In the areas of resource development, coordination, administration and research design IICRD is to be commended. However, as stated earlier in this report there were significant knowledge and experience areas missing from all levels and stages of the project which contributed to YS 'hanging over the comfort zone edge' (figure #3) throughout its life. Therefore, it is important to question whether a better single organization capable of convening or acting as an intermediary of YS exists in Canada today. There are a number of other Foundation initiatives where a team of organizations assumed the Intermediary role when it was recognized that the range of skills and relationships necessary to successfully convene were beyond any one organization.

2.2 There was a need for training on managing a strength-based community development initiative.

"I think we were missing a method that helped us understand how we organize? What do we know about how you organize? There was no training. What are community capacity building processes? Building organizations for change is where we got stuck. We got diverted. IICRD was not giving us the right stuff. Missing systems change stuff to help... what was missing was how do you do systems development."

Convening Organization staff member

In the absence of a model of practice to guide the work of the Convening Organizations, either their own or imported, the community sites set off initially on very different and unsteady journeys. For the most part their processes for community engagement were not evidence-based nor were they executed with the level of confidence that comes with experience. Looking back now on the initiative a reasonable argument can be made that in order to meet the YS mandate the Convening Organization required a coherent working model of community engagement and the training and support services to support it.

In the case of IICRD they may have had a blind spot in not recognizing that the skill and experience they hold in international community development could have informed the work of community-based youth engagement here in Canada. IICRD's flagship *Assessment, Analysis, Action (AAA)* participatory process which they use to engage with international communities provided them

a significant starting point from which to jump into the YS convener role. IICRD provided no direct training on the AAA process or its tools. If the AAA process had been adapted with a design team from each community site to address their specific context, the value to YS of IICRD as the national convening organization would have significantly increased.

IICRD may have been caught unawares of the need for or appropriateness of this form of training for the sites due to the commonly held perception that YS had brought together the country's top agencies in community youth engagement. The picture of necessary skills training was clouded further by a strong sense at the first orientation gathering of the short-listed sites where there was little appetite amongst the sites for IICRD to assume an educator role on topics of either youth engagement or community development. IICRD made this related comment at the time, "We [IICRD] wanted to keep it wide open but our understanding was that our role was to let the sites with apparent expertise do their thing." The DEs chimed in on IICRD's leadership at the time, "They [the sites] were lost but IICRD thought it was to be hands off; it needed leadership but not control."

2.3 Report writing

The objective of reporting within YS varies depending on who is mandating the report. The hope of the reporting process was that it would inform not only the national convener and the Foundation, but also serve as a process of reflection and learning for the community sites. In fact the RFP between the Foundation and the Convening Organization's stated, "Use of a learning journal to form the basis of these reports is highly recommended."

There was significant concern from the community sites with the reporting processes in the first 1.5 years of the project. The primary issue of concern was the amount of time required of the community sites in reporting to IICRD and the Foundation. The concern with the degree of reporting must also be considered in the context of the additional layer of oversight created by the DE. Some comments from the community sites included: "The reporting to the Foundation and IICRD is another thing. This cost a lot of money. Surprising how much the linking really cost – maybe 20 - 25% of time spent on this project." "Keeping in touch with National has been too time consuming, and not reflected in the cost." "Due to the number of communities involved, the brevity and generality of reports, and the widely varying stages of the initiatives, many conveners found these updates to be more tedious and time-consuming than helpful." The Foundation made it clear to IICRD as YS went on to shorten and simplify their requests for information from the sites.

IICRD made significant strides in developing a reporting process meaningful to all parties concerned. Their application of participatory research tools and the facilitation skills of the DEs as a means of collecting information ideally served as effective reflections for the sites prior to report deadlines. One of the DEs confirmed in this case that the target was met: "I wanted to mention that I

thought the requirements for the year-end report were well structured - particularly the questions around mechanisms, guiding principles, and connecting the dots. They helped surface things that might not have been captured otherwise - so good job to you all! From our perspective, I think the report writing was a good exercise. Maybe part of that is timing - i.e., we were asked to take stock of ourselves at a time when things are finally beginning to happen - but I think part of it was also a reflection of the thoughtfulness that went into the requirements for the report."

It was hoped and communicated by the Foundation and IICRD that the reporting process include as much about what wasn't working with YS at their sites as it did about what was. However, it seemed to be difficult for most sites to share what is more commonly considered 'mistakes'. In formal written reports and verbal exchanges too often those reporting to a funder fall into the practice of making whitewashed blanket statements that grab attention and get traction. With encouragement from the DEs as well as their involvement in constructing and writing reports, skillful nudging from the new IICRD National YS Project Coordinator and increased confidence at the sites, the gap between what was being asked for in reporting and what the sites are ready or wanting to talk about has steadily been closing. Though a number of the DEs were asked to do the report writing one ED shared with me that, "though it was helpful to have her [DE] write the reports, it is for team learning. It was difficult to have her write on behalf of the group."

2.4 Staff Roles

The undervalued role of the administrative assistant

A friend in rural N.S. told me a story of going to pay a visit to an elderly neighbour that didn't get out of the house much and received few visitors. Surprisingly when my friend arrived the woman was more up to-date than she was on all the latest community news, personal and otherwise. At first this baffled my friend. Her elderly friend had just told her she hadn't been out of the house in months nor had anyone been in lately. As it turned out the elderly neighbour had a regular practice of listening in on the telephone party line a good part of each day as a means of company.

Most of all, the person in an administrative role at the intersection of considerable information flow needs to excel at communicating in an appreciative manner.

There is need for someone within the national Convening Organization to have this same level of knowing about what is going on in the community sites. Though I'm of course not advocating eaves dropping, I was, upon hearing this story, intrigued with the specialized skills exhibited by the elderly woman's

practice. For no one to detect that she was listening in on their calls took a certain amount of patience and stillness. She must have picked up and set down that phone with barely an audible click. Though she may well have had more current and varied information about the 'goings on' in the village than anyone

else, she carried on unnoticed and she bothered no one.

The IICRD YS Project Assistant was also for the most part 'house-bound', and handled more communication with those at the YS sites than any other national staff member. At a national level the Project Assistant consistently had the most current information from the sites and was the one that most often communicated with them on request for information. Therefore, the Project Assistant role also caught the first wave of impressions from those requests, which during the critical first year of the project were generally more negative waves than positive. There was a lot of push/pull between IICRD and the sites during that period and it was the Project Assistant that was on the front line of that tension. It became clear to me, as Lead DE, based on my observations of these exchanges just how important it is to have the right character and personality type for this role.

Allow me elaborate on the importance of the administrative assistant role from my initial comparison with the elderly eavesdropper, to a more deserved comparison of someone that 'holds down the base'. Like a frontier base, IICRD had connections to or at least awareness of much of what was taking place on the ground in the YS sites. While writing this report I asked my house full of 10 year old boys playing a version of indoor capture the flag, "What characteristics did they want the person looking after their base to have?" Without pause their answers included: strong, confident, responsible, and someone that can concentrate and is smart so they will call for help when it's needed. That wise description aptly sums up what I would describe as the character traits that were necessary for the IICRD YS Project Assistant. Strong enough to ask for what is needed, responsible enough to work independently and smart enough to know they have a large network to engage when needed. Most of all, the person in an administrative role at the intersection of considerable information flow needs to excel at communicating in an appreciative manner.

The degree of influence a position of this nature has on the formation of the culture of a new project is commonly underestimated. The Project Assistance's role in YS had a great deal of influence on the YS culture and should not be taken lightly. Whether it was her official role or not, in the words of the individual that held this position the job was to "gently nudge and keep things rolling along." It was in her attempts to get reports and other submissions in from the sites on time that created the tension points. As the position evolved and the personnel adjusted it became quite clear how important it is that the project administrator, not only communicate appreciatively, but that they communicate with clarity, tact and efficiency regardless of the level of chaos or tension they face. In fairness to all those unsung heroes that have come and gone from these kind of positions with many difficult projects in the country, it must be noted that though we hire individuals for these role because of their skills in organization, control and order, we must recognize that the common nature of new projects is emergence, ambiguity, and at times, chaos. Not an easy soup for these 'administrative types' to jump into.

Youth Community Developer Role - a lack of clarity hurt the overall mandate

During a personnel restructuring that changed over the Project Assistance position at IICRD, YS's Youth Community Developer position was eliminated. This position was originally created with the intent of building a strong youth leadership component in the project. It was also intended that this position would be available to respond in 'real-time' as a resource to the sites on youth engagement, both as a coach and sourcing appropriate resources on demand. The principles behind the role had merit and the function it was attempting was very necessary for YS. Compelling evidence in the field suggests that had there been more youth involvement in decision-making roles early on in YS, the projects early administrative 'wheel spinning' may have been injected with action and networking on the ground.

Regardless of the fact that the principles behind the position had merit, neither of the two individuals that held the role developed clarity on how to execute their work. They were given a great deal of latitude in the role but had little formal means to influence the involvement of youth on the ground at the sites and no strategies that found traction; the position was largely an impotent one.

With the role consuming valuable resources earmarked for the mandate of youth involvement in the project, paradoxically the position may have been blocking youth involvement.

With the ambiguity in the role apparent, I directed some attention to helping clarify the role. With the individual in the role and in cooperation with this IICRD we explored strategies for the role that would highlight the individual's talents while also addressing the

immediate need for more meaningful youth involvement in the project. Having heard from this individual about the idea of offering the sites a youth forum and his excitement for the idea, I coached him on its conceptualization and a process for communicating the idea to the sites. At a time when he and I were openly questioning his future in the role and the role itself, the strategy of a youth forum gave the role some new life. This was a valiant effort to shape and offer a way to move the youth voice forward in YS. Unfortunately for him and the project, the idea fell flat in his attempt to 'sell it' to the sites. In most sites the idea never made it past the Coordinators. One ED of a Community Site shared in an interview late in the project that she had never heard of the idea of the youth forum.

Though many supported the ideals of the position, the role and the idea of the forum were embraced by only a few. With the role consuming valuable resources earmarked for the mandate of youth involvement in the project, paradoxically the position may have been blocking youth involvement. With resources for this mandate directed towards a dedicated position, other options for youth voice in the operations were left largely unexplored.

A quiet assessment of whether or not the position should continue was conducted. Having been already aware of the human resource and structural issues, IICRD responded with critical personnel and structural changes. Following

these changes relations between IICRD and the sites as well as overall communication and networking improved. The mandate of youth involvement in the project was left to the discretion of the sites. Unfortunately, at this point in the project's evolution the opportunity to have youth involvement at the centre of shaping the YS project had passed. There is not one way to ensure youth involvement in a project such as YS. IICRD made a commitment to the ideal of youth involvement with the creation of the Youth Community Developer role and gave it the necessary human and financial support. Unfortunately, it is now clear the strategy did not meet its target.

3. Structural Challenges

Introduction

It is all too common for community development projects to start out strong with plentiful resources and good intentions and then close out with little left to show for their efforts that will have positive lasting impact. There was hope that YS would be different, that it would stimulate system change at various levels. The potential was certainly there. Yet, YS for the most part has fallen into the familiar trap of temporary change at the organizational level for the period of time the cash lasted.

Like a branch weighted down by ice at thaw time, with the ending of the project the various systems for the most part are likely to snap back to their usual ways of operating.

How can we help the branch grow in the new direction?

Within the current year the YS Coordinators and some other frontline staff will move on to other work and take with them much of the practical knowledge generated during the project, and in the midst of all their other enormous challenges the EDs and their Convening Organizations and community partners will cling onto what little they picked up from the project that they might inject into their operations. Like a branch weighted

down by ice at thaw time, with the ending of the project the various systems for the most part are likely to snap back to their usual ways of operating. However, I'm happy to say that now nearing the end of the project that there have been some exceptions to this rule at various sites such as some policy change at UW in Thunder Bay, and a new way to gather stakeholders in HRM. These exceptions of resisting the 'snap back' are worth celebrating and learning from (more on these will appear in the forthcoming YS Handbook).

If projects of the nature of YS are to have more lasting impact there needs to be a willingness to change established organizational norms, rules, routines, and procedures at a number of system levels.

Every organization has structural elements that dictate the way in which people in the organization operate. The functions controlling planning and action are often central to the tension in organizations that attempt to involve young people. As Jessica Bynoe points out in her recent paper, *Confronting the Glass Ceiling of Youth Engagement*, "it is irrelevant how much youth voice there is unless you are aware of the formal decision-making structures" (AED, 2008). The

functions controlling planning and action are also central to tensions that arise in an organization that is attempting to integrate *any* new project. In YS case, being both a new project and an attempt to involve young people, it hit on both of these tension points.

With the mandate of YS encouraging the Convening Organizations to attempt new approaches and involve new players, tensions that built up may have been more difficult to ignore than in most projects. Knowing YS was intended to be a comprehensive and innovative approach to community development with marginalized young people, it is reasonable to expect that traditional program and organizational design structure would be questioned. With most bureaucratic decision-making structures, control for planning and action are generally removed from those doing the work or experiencing the product on the frontline. These structures are disposed to people feeling isolated. Leading systems change expert Merrelyn Emery elaborates, "Simple acts of caring and constructive feedback are discouraged by a structure built around functions rather than group efforts" (Emery, 1999, pg. 6). The Youth services field suffers from this structural flaw. Young people and youth workers have little direct input to the services provided by most public and private youth-serving organizations. YS worked hard at being an exception to this rule.

Structure and its place in shaping YS

YS had hoped to be a comprehensive effort generating innovative responses to its goals. To address the YS vision the Foundation established some parameters that have unquestionably shaped the project's direction. These included:

- small grants to youth-led initiatives or youth-infused projects
- Convening Organizations in the communities
- A national Intermediary Organization
- reporting

There are other parameters (listed below) that some in the Convening Organizations perceived as mandatory, when in fact there was room to propose other options to IICRD, and ultimately the Foundation. The sites reported a sense of having little flexibility in decision-making related to resources or macro strategy. The DEs reported that YS site staff felt that most strategic decisions were dictated by the structure of the funding, the staff make-up and IICRD and that only minor decisions at the level of granting to community projects were left for them to make. However, there was in fact more room for innovative adaptations than some decision makers at the community sites perceived. The Foundation presented *working assumptions* with respect to certain structures but underlined the room to re-imagine traditional ways of working. These included:

- building on the priorities, expertise and relationships of Convening Organizations but not funding their existing projects;
- creating governance structure, such as a Steering Committee, that included youth and adults working in partnership;
- hiring of a Coordinator and/or putting people and mechanisms in place to ensure coordination.

Whether mandated or perceived as mandated, from the outset all the elements of design listed above placed a high degree of influence on the project. The apparent confusion at the site level on what was negotiable and what was not underlines the importance of the Intermediary role communicating to community partners with exacting clarity.

The strategy of the Foundation in providing certain program design parameters such as the small grants fund has demonstrated significant merit. In the section below I attempt to draw attention to just how careful the choice of these parameters need be applied. The answer to whether the parameters mandated as part of the YS project had positive or negative impact will depend on who is answering the question.

Reflective question: How has YS's formal structures, whether mandated or adopted, impacted the project's innovation?

3.1 Project Coordinator's - A lot of expectation put on one position

The idea of a Project Coordinator role is a common element of program design for a community development project. However, over the years I have observed a number of limitations to this structure and the way the role is envisioned in various community and youth development projects. Not all of the sites used a single Coordinator model but for those that did, a number of my past observations from other projects surfaced at the YS sites.

There was a great deal of hope placed on the exchange of knowledge and learning between the Convening Organizations and community partners at the project sites. The need for a rich learning exchange wasn't only between the sites, as was the identified priority, but it was also to draw knowledge from within the Convening Organizations to share with the site Coordinators. It was then intended that a learning exchange would occur between the Coordinators and community partners, both individuals and organizations. The Convening Organizations were also candidates for learning looped back from the frontlines of the project in their community as well as from the other participating YS sites. A system of communication and relationship building was needed that would live up to these needs and expectations for knowledge exchange. It is well documented that in projects such as YS that, at times, require fast and complex structural change the more channels of open communication and understanding available the better (Wheatley, M. Frieze, D., 2006). Unfortunately the design of the organizational structure for YS at the sites made the prospect of maximizing knowledge generation unlikely.

One of the most significant YS structural design flaws was the unrealistic and misdirected expectations put on the Coordinator positions and other single actors at some of the sites. In most non-profit agencies the individuals with the most domain experience hold senior positions. Most of their guidance, if any, for

It is not the idea of a Coordinator's position in itself that I'm suggesting as the problem....these roles commenced prior to a clear collective purpose being established at the sites.

a project such as YS is directed through what are generally much less experienced and often part-time Coordinators. As a result a broader audience (volunteers, partners and participants) involved in a project

must settle for only indirect guidance from the most experienced staff in an agency hosting a project. In most YS sites the same has held true. Whatever indirect knowledge YS partners and volunteers did receive from senior staff of the Convening Organization was channeled through the YS Coordinators. The individuals in the YS Coordinators positions generally had less experience in the domain than the partners and, in some cases, volunteers and grantees.

Reflective question: Has the YS Coordinator position's inadvertently blocked a flow of information and relationship building?

The relatively high cost of a Coordinator role also limits the opportunity to adopt alternative program development strategies. Though the sites were under the impression they were mandated to hire a Coordinator, alternative staffing strategies would have been heard with interest at the Foundation.

It is not the idea of a Coordinator's position in itself that I'm suggesting is the problem, nor do I want to point a finger at those that assumed these very difficult and demanding roles for YS. The situation I want to emphasize is that these roles commenced prior to a clear collective purpose being established at the sites. Even this circumstance in itself would not be a problem if a Coordinator was given a mandate to facilitate a common visioning and planning process and hired based on the appropriate skills to execute it. And finally, a structure must be built around a mandate of maximum involvement in decision-making and communication.

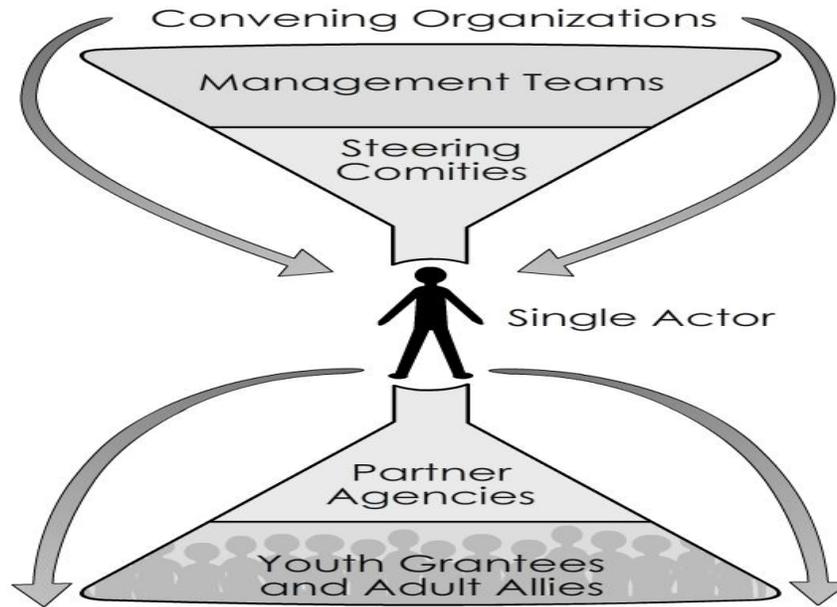


Figure #5: YS's structure created a circumstance at most sites of high dependence on a single actor (Coordinator or Senior Administrator)

In lieu of a common planning process, most of the YS sites had only their reputations, the grant money and a minimal amount of their senior staff person's time to stimulate the task of convening community partners and building collective purpose. Not an uncommon platform for community development projects, but not sufficient to build a comprehensive common plan that generates innovative solutions. In the absence of a common plan for the YS Coordinators and other front-line workers they were left with inadequate guidance on how to proceed. The Coordinators had a wide variety of skill sets that along with varying and vague mandates contributed to a few of the Coordinators assuming a great deal of authority over the direction of the project. It was said by one site administrator, "they [Coordinators] can run everything out of their back pocket." In the majority of the sites, not only did the project become vulnerable to adopting the personality and character of the Coordinator, the position had undue limitations placed on it as a result of the skills of this one individual. One Coordinator shared that she felt, "the project was 75% Coordinator-driven." In sites where this was not the case, it was the Convening Organizations ED or a senior administrator that assumed much of the single-authority with some of the same negative impacts. Hence, the potential of a single staff-driven structure to foster a quality knowledge transfer appears to be very limited.

The Convening Organizations were left to their own devices to shape the Coordinators role, job posting, and job description. The assessment of what skills were required for these roles was left to the perspective of the site administrators or EDs or in some cases designates on hiring committees. Offering evidence-based resources and support to the sites at this critical stage would have been a

high leverage point intervention by IICRD. It is also important to note that the pools of candidates for these positions were very limited at a few of the sites by both the pay scale and the part-time basis of the job. Hampered by a booming economic climate and the low levels of unemployment in Western Canada, one site went through two separate job postings and three months before finding a suitable applicant. This too added to the complexity surrounding the Coordinator's role.

Throughout the first 1.5 years of the project questions surfaced from some of the EDs of the Convening Organizations and IICRD as to whether or not the Coordinator's at some sites had the necessary skills to move the YS agenda forward. The skills and in some cases lack thereof, personalities, and character traits of some Coordinators consumed a great deal of IICRD's and the DEs time in the first 1.5 years of YS. One Developmental Evaluator summed up the skills and characteristics of one Coordinator, "Her skills were not able to address the many issues. She has been very controlling. She was not able to facilitate youth leadership, nor was she good with adults. She was just not a people person. She alienated many people in the community." Three site Coordinators left or were asked to leave the position and one site is on their third Coordinator in under three years. With these circumstances unanticipated and the 'game on', IICRD had the difficult task of orientating on the fly new Coordinators who had very diverse skills, and vague mandates.

The comfort zone for most of the Coordinators has been working directly with young people. A number of the Coordinators spent their time directly with young people who have, amongst other things, become a central part of the small grants decision-making process. Though their skill sets and experience drew the Coordinators to work directly with young people, it is worth considering whether they could have assumed more of an intermediary role supporting the capacity building of existing groups of young people already imbedded within youth-serving systems.

Reflective Question: Does the practice of YS Coordinators and other front-line staff working directly with young people, limit the opportunity for other community members and youth workers to get involved in what could be the projects greatest place of energy – youth leadership?

3.2 Management Teams

One of the more difficult challenges presented by the way in which the project was structured at the sites was how to shift ownership from the Convening Organization to the broader community. For a number of the sites many decisions deemed to be operational in nature have been made by two or three staff people of the Convening Organizations. For more 'elevated' or strategic decisions a number of the YS sites created a form of 'Management Team', with small groups of staff and/or key community partners. There have been decisions made by YS Management Teams that the DE concerned and others, felt

needed to be opened up to a larger group. The decisions as to what should go to these Management Teams were often left to the Coordinator or ED of the Convening Organization, with occasional input from the DE. In a number of cases the Coordinator alone made what could be considered important strategic decisions. Finding a balance between participative decision-making and the expediency that comes with decisions made by staff has been difficult for a number of the sites. One DE described even the Management Team as, “redundant and too bulky.”

The importance of dealing with the challenge of how to shift ownership from the Convening Organization to the broader community cannot be underestimated. Leading whole systems expert Merrelyn Emery states: “A small select or elite internal team with an agenda for changing or directing everyone’s job is rarely able to generate enough excitement and sense of ownership to drive adoption throughout an entire organization” (Cabana, 1997, pg. 2). One DE reported that as a result of the internal decision making structures, “stakeholder voices were being lost”. Without open channels of exchange there was also evidence of tension and anxiety expressed privately that had no effective means to surface in the larger group. In the case of YS this led to discontent being discussed in the project’s Common Space Vestibules (see figure #2).

Reflective question: Did the decision-making authority of YS Management Teams at the YS sites decrease the engagement of others outside of the Convening Organization?

3.3 Steering Committees

“We spent lots of time building a city-wide Steering Committee, now we know it was a damn waste of time.”

Site-based Developmental Evaluator

My sense is that the YS sites thought they were mandated to establish Steering Committees. The RFP stated, “It is a working assumption of this project that each community initiative will have a steering committee comprised of young people and adults from diverse backgrounds and sectors.” As a ‘working assumption’ the sites had some room to be creative with a governance structure that they did not immediately act on. The principle behind the working assumption was understandable and in my opinion, entirely appropriate - to establish a broad footing in the community through strong relationship with a diversity of community organizations and youth and adults working together. However, knowing how to effectively establish and maintain Steering Committee structures in most sites has proved problematic.

Simply *forming* a community committee does not assure its dynamism or its participatory or functional process. ‘Committees’ as they are commonly operated these days are often stale and a misfit for the people around the table and the task at hand. One YS site staff put it this way “find someone that wants

to sit on a committee and when you do, you unfortunately need to question their motives.”

Together the evidence of the YERC and YS sites regarding Steering Committees is compelling. As a result of their ineffectiveness 8 of 10 sites disbanded their Steering Committees with-in one year from the start of their projects.

Four of five YS sites significantly altered their Steering Committee structure within the first year of the project. Descriptions of the YS Steering Committees included that: “they were redundant”,

“there was an identity crisis”; “they were not youth-friendly”; “there was a disconnect between the convening organization, the steering committee and the youth they were supposed to represent” and, “no one really understood the role of SC”.

It is worthwhile to also consider my own recent research of a very similar nature to YS in five rural sites, the *Youth Engagement in Rural Communities* project (YERC) (Langlois, 2008). Four of five YERC community sites also disbanded their Steering Committees within the first year of operation due to their ineffectiveness.

Together the evidence of the YERC and YS sites regarding Steering Committees is compelling. As a result of their ineffectiveness 8 of 10 sites disbanded their Steering Committees within one year from the start of their projects. It is interesting to note that in the two sites in the separate research projects that maintained their committees the committees were established prior to the project's commencement.

As YS moved into its final year a number of the sites had re-imagined how their Steering Committees should operate, who it should and should not include, and the way they were to meet.

Recommendation: It is recommended that prior to formalizing a Steering Committees or other form of governance structure, that a process of a shared direction by those to be directly impacted by the project take place.

It is further recommended that projects with an intent of being a comprehensive community collaborative, take ample time to weigh options for structuring their decision making and meeting processes, and submit those as principles to the convening or funding body.

3.4 Small Grants Funding Parameters

One year into the project there was significant unrest in the air between IICRD, the Foundation, and the sites. Much of the tension surfaced around the parameter established by the Foundation that 35% of program funds at the sites were to be disbursed through a small grants fund to young people. This parameter was based on evidence in the field. Providing small grants to young

people for community projects has been widely recognized as a highly effective strategy for youth engagement. Lack of clarity in communicating about the funding parameter at one point created a very serious threat to the future of YS. Three of the four sites funded by the Foundation were talking about leaving the project. The intention of documenting this here is not to be overly dramatic - it is to communicate the importance of all parties concerned with a funding parameter being crystal clear in their communication to community sites.

Looking back on the situation surrounding the small grants, it appears that the National Convener needed to adopt a more directive style of leadership; a minimum specification from the funder needed to be described as such. IICRD's use of only a soft coaching style where it concerned the small grants parameter forced the hand of the Foundation to step in and be more directive.

It is important to shine a bit of light on what was taking place related to this issue surrounding the small grants funding parameter. As put in the popular book on social innovation *Getting to Maybe*: "Where you stumble, there your treasure is" (Westley et al. pp 187). I suspect other multi-year CCI have experienced similar tensions during a project's early period when criteria mandated by a project funder bumped into the realities on the ground. Against a backdrop of a significant learning curve, having the funder mandate a particular strategy for youth engagement at the time proved difficult for the Convening Organizations to accept. Reflecting back now that the project is nearing its end, it seems clear that regardless of how YS got there, the small grants projects resulted in YS's most significant youth engagement outcomes: youth involvement in organizational decision-making, engagement of adults in support of specific projects, skills development for young people, visibility of youth changemakers in the community, plus the positive impact of the projects themselves.

Reflection question: In addition to slowing down on-the-ground action, did the frustration, anxiety and ambiguity built up around the small grants parameter distract from generative dialogue on alternative engagement strategies?

4. The search for alternative forms of organizing and governing

"Some are beginning to understand that bureaucratic structures, methods and designs are incapable of producing participative and democratic organizations."

Merrelyn Emery

Though we fool ourselves into believing non-profit groups and committees such as YS's Management Teams and Steering Committees are cooperative by nature, the reality is they are structures like most: built of competition and hierarchy. The Convening Organizations hosting YS are structured with an Executive Director and Board of Directors that have the authority to direct the agency's resources. The evidence suggests that under these circumstances the degree of learning harvested is tied to the degree that those formally 'in-charge' attempt to maintain control. Important learning for an agency could multiply if

the agency and project leaders were to assume the role of equal learner, embracing projects such as YS as an opportunity for investigating new forms of organizing. In this way a new project would be analogous to a temporary research and development unit within the organization – a pocket for innovation. This is the kind of generative culture that can be built into what was earlier referred to as a common space.

The good news is that a few of the Convening Organizations responded to the limitations that emerged from the Steering Committee and Management Team structures with new alternative forms of decision-making. In the words of one of the DEs involved “we were striving to create a more *balanced* structure.” The new structures had a variety of functions and form. For the most part, the proposed changes were designed to encourage democratic and cooperative principles.

At one site an alternative form of meeting was established under the name “The Marketplace”. One team member described it as, “a space that would encourage people to talk more freely about what they wanted”. The hope for “The Marketplace” was to highlight what young people were doing, to create more of an exchange, and to be an information collection point, including giving and receiving feedback. At other sites small Management Teams were created in an attempt to encourage more ad hoc team decision-making. At still other sites all-youth Selection Committees were formed to make decisions on the small grant funds. It is worth noting that the small grants program filled the void created by the absence of a focus for systems change action. Under the circumstances, the small grants fund was successful in ‘forcing the hand’ of some convening agencies to get decision-making power into the hands of young people and as a result it created an alternative pocket of decision-making.

It is interesting to note that the majority of *youth-led* organizations both formal and informal are structured with democratic and cooperative principles. These organizations are drawing a great deal of attention in the youth engagement field as a result of their high levels of participation and output. Apt questions for YS and its Convening Organizations might be: “How might they experience some of the benefits normally derived from the kind of democratic and cooperative principles used by many youth-led groups in their early stages?” “How might adult-controlled youth-serving organizations attract the kind of engagement from young people that youth-led organizations seem to be able to accomplish?” “Besides the Grant Selection Committees, what other pockets of opportunity might there have been within YS’s common spaces for alternative forms of organizing and as a result new opportunities for genuine youth leadership and innovation?”

4.1 The Role of Gatherings

The concept of ‘gathering’ together key actors in a program’s leadership is common practice. Personal relationships gained through time spent together is

central to leveraging opportunities and dealing with any difficult situations that are common as emergent projects moves forward. The program officer of the Foundation, in a short talk given at the end of one of the YS Gatherings, shared his perspective: "Gatherings like this one are essential to this work. It is important to explore how we shape these events to maximize their impact." I share below a few comments below on the idea of designing gatherings for maximum impact.

Though the question of the 'next level of development' for YS is addressed at the national level, it is precariously balanced with the distinct context at each site at the time of gathering. Success of a Gathering balances on the line between both the National Convener and the funder's desire to nudge the project's development, and the realities at the sites. Considering these complexities the content of a Gathering can often best be designed once the people from a system are in the room together at a Gathering. This requires an open space whole system type of design of at least the beginning of a Gathering. The evidence on whole system design approaches is compelling. It encourages us to trust that given the opportunity, a group of people within a system will act purposefully and wisely in responding to its environment (Emery and Trist, 1965). YS Gatherings have gradually adopted more open whole system design principles. IICRD has worked diligently to gather input and perspectives from the sites to shape Gatherings held in the later months of the project so that a more dynamic balance is found between national vision and site-based realities.

As stated earlier in this report, we know from evidence that it is important in emergent program context to open as many channels of effective communication and interpersonal exchange as possible. With the value of relationship building and generative learning that can take place at a Gathering, *who* attends is quite significant. Clarifying whom a particular Gathering is intended for and when it would be most strategic to gather them are critical decisions. It should not be *assumed* for instance, as has been the YS practice to-date, that Coordinators and/or Administrators should attend all YS Gatherings. Limiting participation to this group alone limits broader relationship building, and learning dissemination to and between sites. One DE shared this perspective on the combinations of who we might have gathered for YS, "I wonder if we would have had better results at the national gatherings if we had focused on getting, for example, all the EDs together, all the Coordinators together, etc. and been very clear about what we were all needing/wanting to learn and explore. Deciding what individuals or groups to gather (invite) should be based on careful consideration of leverage points that can help develop the program to its next stage at the national and local level.

5. Front end assessment of a Convening Organization

As reported in Section #1 of this report, if a Convening Organization had previous experience and skill in community organizing as well as knowledge of the concepts and practices of systems change that the objectives of YS had a

better chance of being met. Therefore, in the future, it may be worth considering a more targeted form of assessment than what was used for the selection process of the YS community sites. This is not to say that the choice of community sites and Convening Organizations and partners would necessarily have changed but gathering different information in a different way, might have guided a different form of financial and capacity building support for the communities. Allow me to preface this section by reminding the reader that hind sight is 20/20. This is written as a reflection looking back on what was and looking forward to what could be for future assessment efforts.

5.1 What are the priorities?

Before an assessment process for a project such as YS is undertaken a decision on priority criteria must be made. In YS's case the *Guidelines For Evaluating Proposals* document produced by IICRD for evaluating the final YS proposals was distinctive and covered some important ground (Appendix C). The guidelines were discussed under the rubrics of:

- meaningful youth engagement
- impact
- system readiness for change/ enabling environment
- innovation/creativity
- capacity of convening organization for meaningful youth engagement
- engagement and commitment to the learning community
- diversity.

Though the Guidelines were helpful throughout the process, some important structural information was lacking in the proposals. The manner in which information was gathered and assessed could now be improved upon. Considering the breadth of the themes in the Guidelines document, future assessments would benefit from a similar tool to help an assessment be more exacting in uncovering the competencies and culture of the applicant agencies and the project proposals being submitted.

5.2 What exactly was meant by 'community'?

There was some ambiguity regarding what particular system the assessments were directed at. For example, one of the guidelines asks, "Is the *community* ready to take on a comprehensive approach?" "Is the *community* invested in agreeing on a vision and committing to making some change?" and another states that YS is, "...asking *communities* to do things differently." Though there is merit to these probes, the concept of 'community' leaves too much room for a surface level response. A pivotal question would be: "Who is being assessed as the 'community': the steering committee, the staff of the convening agency, the board of the convening agency, those that were to form a Management Team, or ultimately, the Coordinator to be hired?" Each of these questions introduces a different system with its own unique cultural tendencies, as has been quite evident over the last two years. Should the decision on which and how deeply to assess a particular system's 'readiness' for a project such as YS be tied to the

question of where the real power and influence on project decisions will lay? In theory YS's site-based decisions lie with the EDs of the Convening Organizations. However, it is prudent to note that theory and initial design often are thrown out the window in emergent circumstances. We now know there would have been value in more closely assessing the leadership of the Convening Organizations, the role of the Coordinators, and how the local organizations proposed to adapt the structures mandated by the Foundation.

5.3 How well do we know the agency applying?

In YS's desire to encourage a comprehensive approach it is perhaps the Convening Organizations and the context it operates in that was most overlooked. The maturity of youth engagement practices in community development in the various communities and their youth service agencies were overlooked. The level of youth-led activity in Montreal is very different than it is in Calgary, and very different again from what is taking place in Halifax. This is not to say certain cities were to be avoided, but it would have prepared the national leadership for different challenges to emerge from each site as the YS mandate hit the ground in the various sites.

The ambiguity of the concept of assessing the readiness of a 'community' I spoke of above may also have distracted attention away from a deeper look at where the power for decision-making was to be – with the Convening Organizations and eventually in many cases its designate, the Coordinators. How much did we really know about the competencies, capacities, and culture of these organizations? One of the Guidelines themes was the "Capacity of the Convening Organization for meaningful youth engagement". This particular Guideline clarified its intent with questions that seemed on the surface to be more about organizational development than youth engagement, but IICRD was aware of the interrelationships of these two variables. The clarifying questions for this guideline included: "How strong is its management?" "How much does the Convening Organization reflect the values of the initiative?" "Does the organization have the capacity/respect to involve stakeholders from a variety of sectors?" Two years into the project we can now see that the direction these questions were pointing were very appropriate. Unfortunately, though the questions were asked, the probe didn't go deep enough to provide the kind of valuable information that could be used in designing support structures for the Convening Organizations.

In YS's case a deeper probe might have included: a good look at the Convening Organization's core values as known through their practice and their congruence with the Foundation's Guiding Principles for Engaging Youth (Appendix A). We now also know some more specific themes of inquiry that would have helped with the quality of the assessments: What is the organizational practice for building their learning capacity? Do they have any community organizing expertise? What ability have they demonstrated to meaningfully involve marginalized young people? What is their usual style of

facilitating groups? And...how does the YS project align with the organization's strategic directions and their current phase of development?

Reflective Question: What could be done differently with an RFP or other process, to encourage applicant agencies to do a deeper self-assessment of what systems change activity is already in motion at their agencies, and how to broaden those efforts with new allies, governance models and knowledge. ,

An assessment for a project such as YS should help a granting body and a support agency such as IICRD determine what effects the introduction of a new project such as YS might have on an applicant organization. An enhanced assessment at the proposal stage of a project could help determine the organizational vulnerabilities of applicant agencies and their level of receptivity to interventions. It is clear now that this type of information would have been quite helpful in at least one YS site which experienced a significant organizational roadblock as a result of taking on YS and eventually left the project.

"If we are to go with this model you better be damn sure you have the commitment of the boss!"

The designs of the YS project left potential areas of vulnerability such as the level and type of support the sites would provide the Coordinators, staff buy-in, and what else was going on at the applicant agency. In the words of one DE, "if we are to go

with this model you better be damn sure you have the commitment of the boss!" An assessment of the applicant agency's stage of development and its predominant culture goes deeper than these questions suggest. If the culture of the Convening Organization was 'unhealthy' before YS came into their mix, one way or another, YS was to be impacted.

Assessing the level of team work at an applicant agency is one way to determine its state of wellness and its ability to manage an emergent new project. Articulated in a number of different ways there was a great deal of emphasis in the YS vision on team work but very little effort to determine the quality of team work and learning that existed in the Convening Organizations. The closest the questions in the Guidelines went down this path were, "How strong is its management?" With the demanding environments non-profit organizations face the idea of taking time to build a team environment seems a distant luxury. Building a learning organization is not something one does off the side of one's desk. To be successful it must be embedded as a value and practice that guides the way the people of the organization relate to one another. It could be expected that an agency lacking a team environment that encourages learning would have significant challenges successfully managing a project like YS, let alone having any hope of sustainable changes at the organizational level. This was certainly the case in at least one site that left the project within one year.

There are easily administered questionnaires for measuring wellness in the workplace that could inform a process of site selection. There are tools in the field now and others that could be easily created based on learning generated during YS. Here are just a few of the theme areas to add to and highlight what has been said above:

- the extent of youth engagement within existing programs and services,
- new ways and means of engaging youth within an organization
- underlying values and action principles that may impact youth engagement as a commonplace practice within an organization.

On-site interviews can also uncover a great deal about the culture and leadership of an organization.

Section F. The Tour Ends

1. Summary

That sums up this tour through the YS landscape. As stated at the outset, I offer you these perspectives with the hope of being in service to the sector and more importantly to young people ready to take action on shaping a more just and caring Canada.

Our congratulations to the Foundation, IICRD, the Convening Organizations and all the community partners and youth that have taken the YS path; they deserve or respect and thanks. What was being attempted was an important vision for the country and the work has been hard. There has been some success on the ground to be proud of and what has been learned I think, is significant. I would venture to say that as a result of YS the equation of engaging marginalized young people in building more resilient communities is no longer as complex as it once was. YS succeeded in reducing the equation to being simply complicated. Complicated, we can manage!

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3. Appendixes

Appendix A - Guiding Principles for Engaging Youth

Supporting youth-led organizations (and the organizations that support them)

The Foundation has noted that some of the most interesting examples of renewal are found within youth-led or highly youth-engaging organizations. One interesting characteristic of these organizations is their tendency to create 'spaces' rather than programs; a garden, a kitchen, a skate park in development, a campus in the process of greening, a magazine, an Internet site all offer potential for young people to develop their own initiatives, which build on their interests and skills, within the larger project. The projects undertaken by grantees like Santropol Roulant and Sierra Youth Coalition are good examples of this.

Focus on action-oriented projects, which have an impact now and develop capacity for the longer term

Our work with youth has demonstrated that youth are not only citizens in training. They have the potential to act now and they have a particular perspective to contribute that can inspire innovative approaches to the challenges facing Canadian society. We have also noted that young people best learn by doing. Therefore, active engagement during youth not only ensures that young people can have an immediate impact but also that they are developing capacity that can be enhanced and applied over a lifetime. Young people have the energy and passion to act now and this should be harnessed rather than suppressed 'until they grow up', by which time it may have dissipated.

Supporting local, place-based projects

We think that the first place for young people to act is in their own communities. Connecting with and acting on what is closest to us is an appropriate first step for an engaged citizen. In recent years, many young people have tended to become disconnected from their local communities, moving into virtual spaces on the Internet or concerning themselves with global issues, where their potential for impact is limited and which may lead to a sense of disempowerment. At the same time, we assume that the power of electronic communication and the benefits of a global perspective can be harnessed in support of concrete and empowering action in our local communities.

Promoting leadership development in the community

Leadership training is important in developing the capacity of young people but many training programs treat youth as individuals disconnected from the communities where they will be potential leaders. We would prefer to support initiatives that train young people within and with their communities (as in the *Community Youth Development* approach developed by HeartWood). In this way, young people both develop an understanding of the context and the structures around them while working with their fellow community members to create spaces where young people can act.

Encouraging inter-generation relationships

An effective approach to both training and building community connections is through mentoring and we propose in this strategy to take particular advantage of the opportunities inherent in inter-generational mentoring. Youth can learn from older community leaders

and teach their elders how to work with young people. Youth can also share their learning with those younger than themselves; we have noted the tremendous satisfaction that youth of different ages seem to derive from these relationships and also that there are fewer opportunities for them in the current social context of small families and age-specific recreational programming.

Building social networks

We have noted that building social networks is a key goal for youth. Young people are looking to be part of something and ideally, the gang that they latch onto will be a constructive rather than a destructive force in their lives.

Inclusive engagement

Our sense is that supporting initiatives with the characteristics noted above can serve the needs of both emerging community leaders and at-risk youth and we hope to attract proposals for a range of projects that will cumulatively engage all young people.

Effecting systems change

Projects that simply involve activities for youth will not be supported under this strategy. Grantees must be able to demonstrate that they have a project or program that will effect change in relation to a community issue, a space or an institution.

We think that youth-led organizations have the capacity to mentor adult-led organizations (including youth-serving organizations and government institutions) in their efforts to involve and serve young people more effectively. This interaction can change the way organizations and institutions work, thus creating new spaces for youth engagement. By strengthening national level initiatives that work with local organizations and collect and disseminate new knowledge, we can ensure that such new spaces are created at a national level.

Knowledge Development

In Canada and elsewhere, there is uncertainty regarding how to engage the next generation. The Foundation has played an important role in the effort to develop knowledge in this area and can continue to both lead and complement the work of others. An important component of this program will be giving youth themselves the tools to analyze their experience and share their learning.

Appendix B - Guide Post

Guideposts in Action

The guideposts have served multiple purposes in helping keep the initiative on track this year. They provided a strengths-based assessment tool, created a structure for documenting progress and acted as a planning mechanism.

Emerging Definitions:

Local partners across the country are working with young people and their communities to help define the National YouthScape Guideposts:

Systems Change

YouthScape interventions have the potential to create long-term change in communities (issues, spaces, or institutions) and the potential to ripple out across the social ecology in a way that is sustained and systemic, ideally addressing 'root causes'.

Strengths-Based

All interventions related to YouthScape intentionally build on assets or strengths by identifying opportunities within individuals and communities to address identified issues by adopting an appreciative lens.

Youth Leadership

The intention of YouthScape is to put youth at the centre of interventions where they can influence and shape all stages of projects, from design to implementation and evaluation. Young people's evolving capacity is taken into consideration and meaningful youth-adult partnerships are there for support.

Accountability

YouthScape provides structures and forums that allow for meaningful decision-making and shared ownership by community stakeholders (for instance, youth and community involvement extending beyond the convenor).

Diversity

YouthScape intentionally involves young people with a variety of lived experiences, in particular those who have been systemically

disenfranchised (by ethnicity, age, or other considerations). YouthScape is about being open-minded, and about welcoming innovation.

Learning Community

YouthScape recognizes the need to nurture relationships across the social ecology; create a safe space to share triumphs, tribulations and challenges; exchange ideas and lessons learned; and collectively 'grow'.

Appendix C - Guidelines For Evaluating Proposals

GUIDELINES USED FOR EVALUATING THE PROPOSALS

1) Meaningful Youth Engagement

Does the proposal indicate an openness or strategy to achieve meaningful youth engagement? How are youth setting priorities and involved in decision-making? Is the approach to youth engagement about partnership, and connected to community development? Are youth an active partner in the planning or a target group? Does the budget reflect accountability to young people?

2) Impact

What is the *impact* of the initiative? How will their strategic approach contribute to youth and the community? What are the markers identified or proposed to measure the achievements. What are the changes they propose to bring? How will the vision and the implementation plan outlined contribute to the well being of young people, as defined by young people?

3) System readiness for change/ enabling environment.

Is the community ready to take on a comprehensive approach? Is the community invested in agreeing on a vision and committing to making some change? Is there appropriate focus on programming for the purpose of this initiative?

4) Innovation/ Creativity.

This Initiative is asking communities to do things differently? Does the proposal reflect an openness to take risk and do things another way? What is different from what they usually do? Are new partners or approaches being proposed?

5) Capacity of Convening Organization for meaningful youth engagement

The convening organization plays an important role in bringing together different actors and moving forward a vision. Does it appear to have community support? How strong is its management? How much does the convening organization reflect the values of the initiative? Does the organization have the capacity/ respect to involve stakeholders from a variety of sectors? Is it able to work collaboratively? Does the process undertaken this first phase suggest that is the case? Is the convening organization involving the private sector?

6) Engagement and Commitment to the learning community

A critical element of the Initiative is contributing to and collaborating in the learning community. Does the convening organization have experience in being part of learning networks? Are they interested?

7) Diversity

What range of young people/organizations are being included in the Initiative? Are 'marginalized' young people included? What are the efforts to reach out to the disenfranchised groups? Are there specific resources committed to meet this objective?



Developmental Evaluation in Practice

An Addendum to the YouthScape Developmental Evaluation Report

Marc Langlois
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February, 2010

Addendum to Youth Scope Developmental Evaluation Report February, 2010

Developmental Evaluation in Practice

1. Positioning the Developmental Evaluators

There is an activity called the Listening Post I was fond of using as part of an environmental education program I led for elementary school students a number of years back. In the activity the 'Earthwalkers' as we came to refer to them, chose a tree with-in earshot of where I stood at a meeting place deep in the forest. Their reasons for choosing a particular tree as their Listening Post would vary, but, when asked they would all have a reason. Their task was to stay at their Listening Post and quietly listen and observe for ten minutes. The students then came back to the meeting place and shared with us what they heard and saw. It was always fascinating that in the short distances they were spread apart how many different sights and sounds they would bring back to share.

The children in these programs went back to their Listening Post two or three times during a two-day program, each time staying a little longer and each time having more to share upon their return. The exciting thing about the Listening Post for the children was that as time went on their anticipation of the next visit to their Listening Post grew. It became so that they knew what they wanted to watch for and check out before they got back to their Listening Post. The times of sharing back at the meeting spot became a time of looking back and looking forward anticipating changes at their spot. The forest never stopped changing, our group of Earthwalkers just dropped in for a series of visits to watch the dance go by.

A researcher might call the equivalent of a Listening Post a unit of analysis. For a DE a Listening Post is likened to 'positioning'. It enables them to take up at any particular time any particular focus. DEs take up various positions within a system for the best vantage point of a particular aspect of a program. For example, one YS DE for a number of months was positioned to focus on the dynamics between the Convening Organization, their staff and the Board of Directors. In another instance, a DE was positioned to work with the community Steering Committee and in another with the relationship between a Coordinator and young people. The positioning of the DEs changed with the development needs of the project. The most effective positioning for any particular context is determined through careful ongoing reflection.

In addition to information gathered from the site-based DEs, as the Lead DE, I had my own direct observations from the Listening Post that I frequented at the national level of the YS initiative. My choice of Listening Posts at any given time was chosen because of compelling stories from those involved in YS, other DEs, or IICRD. In addition, the evidence in the field of youth engagement and my

many years of directly related experience informed my choice of Listening Posts. I came into the role of Lead DE with some preconceived ideas and bias of some of the areas I thought might offer the greatest learning and breakthroughs for the project. A researcher might refer to these ideas as themes to pay attention to. I for instance paid particular attention to the first exchanges between adults and youth in the various contexts within the project. Upon reflection, I believe these were indeed critical moments of opening the program up to a larger audience of young people. The site-based DEs positioned themselves to sensitizing themes such as steering committee communication and culture, youth and adult relationships and national and local convening agency communication.

At times during YS there was a coordinated effort to align the positioning of all the DEs to shift YS's attention. In year two with direction from the national organizers (IICRD and the Foundation) and a consultation with the Convening Organizations Executive Directors, there was a deliberate effort to shift attention away from inner dynamics at most of the convening agencies and Steering Committees to community partners and potential youth grantees. It was the opinion of the national organizers that a significant action, such as disbursing youth grants, would help turn around stagnating relationships and renew the project's energy and its original sense of purpose. With deadlines imposed by the funder, the DEs went to work assisting the sites with the necessary decision making to begin the granting process. As Lead DE, it is my opinion that the imposed deadline for granting and the accompanying repositioning of the DEs expedited the process of getting grants out the door and moved YS into a stage of more tangible action.

2. The authority to do the work

Positioning a DE concerns, not only what they are paying attention to, but, also the 'authority' to do so from the EDs of the Convening Organizations concerned. A critical feature of bureaucratic structure is that responsibility for coordination and control of day-to-day work is located at least one level above where the work is actually being done. The effectiveness of Developmental Evaluation is, therefore, tied to one's level of access to all relevant components of the decision-making chain.

There were some challenges with positioning the DEs during the YS project. The full program landscape was not made available to the DEs at all sites. At one site the DE was consistently denied uncontested access to youth and agency partners associated with the program. Except for circumstances where the DE concerned had pre-established relationships the information and perspectives they sought were only available to them second hand through the site Coordinator. Access to information was obstructed through roadblocks more than authority. In the case of YS with Project Coordinator's being so close to the program it is appropriate that they have some degree of influence on the DE's work, but, for a Coordinator or any other single staff person to be the primary source of direction for the DE in a CCI is problematic. A DE requires a high

degree of freedom to wander the program landscape to conduct an objective evaluation based on pre-established priorities. Though the DEs officially reported to the EDs of the Convening Organizations, in practice some site Coordinators were in a position to significantly influence to whom the DE spoke. It is also very important to carefully consider who officially employs a DE. A DE employed on behalf of a funder for instance will have different dynamics to manage than a DE employed by an organization leading a program.

The project landscape for the DEs was also obstructed by circumstances. As a CCI the Developmental Evaluation was intended to monitor the project beyond the boundaries of its Convening Organizations, however, this practice was the exception. Turbulent dynamics in YS's first year and the learning curve stimulated by the small grants program in its second, demanded most of the DEs' attentions to be focused in-house with the Convening Organizations. At most sites only late in the second year with the grants being issued, and into the third year were the DEs encouraged to focus their attentions externally. Only in the final 6 months of the project is it expected that the DEs will operate with a broader project landscape boundary, the kind of boundary one would expect from a Developmental Evaluation of a CCI. However, as noted in the chart above, the DEs in a number of the sites assumed more of a story collecting and writing role in final year of the project, than that of a DE.

Recommendation: Prior to starting a Developmental Evaluation those themes important to pay attention to should be clarified, and the authority associated with the role.

3. Specific Examples of the DE YouthScape Impacts

Positioning a DE To Get the Project Back on Track

Describing YS's DEs as solely observers in the program landscape tells only part of the story. The Earthwalkers I spoke of earlier brought only observations back from their Listening Post with an ethic of no trace of their having been there. Other than maybe a snapped twig they were largely successful with an objective of minimal landscape alteration. In the case of the DEs, they too attempted to only minimally disturb the emerging project landscape. However, they did at times make observations that signaled the potential need for some degree of intervention – an alteration of the landscape. The 'signal' for a DE is not always clear or consistent, it could be many things, but what it is is something observed that steps outside of the values, practices and/or direction that the collective leadership of the program has agreed to. It is not the role of the DE to make interventions independent of the program leadership, only to help the group be aware of when they appear to be wandering from the path and direction they established together.

This intervention work is delicate; my own YS interventions often straddled two or more systems.

At the point of the observation a DE may have shared thoughts and/or made recommendations with program decision makers at the site or, in my case, with the Foundation and/or IICRD. Depending on the circumstances the DE may have suggested a process for executing an intervention and then been involved in implementing it. What these interventions will have had in common is that they were and continue to be designed to encourage the project's development. This intervention work is delicate; my own interventions often straddled two or more systems (IICRD, the Foundation, ED of a Convening Organization, Coordinators) each with their own perspective on the item at hand.

Like the Earthwalkers I spoke of earlier I too returned to various Listening Posts repeatedly, others I visited only once. Some of these Listening Posts produced data (information, stories, perspectives) I deemed important to share straight away, in other cases it has taken until my reflection for this report to work out the complexity of the scenes in my head and then to decide what was important to share and how to best do that. The chart below introduces some of the Listening Posts I assumed during the program. There were distinct Listening Posts for each of the various stages of the project's development. The chart below introduces my own and other DE's Listening Posts at the various stages of the project.

The stages of YS's development:

- *Pre-Launch* - The early stages of the YS system coming together with the seven Convening Organizations that were invited to submit an application and attend an orientation meeting in Victoria, B.C. in 2007
- *Launch* - The Convening Organizations consumed with recruiting staff, clarifying partnerships, and scheduling the project in the organizations operational calendar. Though there seemed to be a sense of the possible, there was the usual anxiety that comes with new emergent processes.
- *Thirst for Action* - With a small grants program mandated by the funder and a thirst for action at multiple levels, there was an intense period of clarifying the targets for granting.
- *Reinventing Structure* - Much of the original structure at a national and community level is re-invented to better fit the emerging project needs.
- *Clarifying relationships and support* - grants going out and relationships with youth and community groups growing, the question in a number of sites became, "How can we best support grantees?" In still other sites with the granting program limited to smaller numbers, the questions became, "How do we better address the YS mandate?"
- *Year Three, new activities for DEs* - With the YS program context at the sites less complex and emergent in year three, the need for a DE on-site decreased. The DEs were given some new responsibilities that more closely resembled that of Action Researchers and case writers. A number of the

DEs however also continued in the role of supporting the learning of the Convening Organizations as they explored what practices that emerged as part of their YS project, they would embed in their organizations.

Specific Examples of YS DE work. (N) National, Lead DE; (S) Site-based DE

Stages of project Development	Listening Post - what the DE's where paying attention to	What the DE's were hearing	Interventions to keep the project on track
Pre-Launch	Design team of pre-launch event (N)	- need for more interaction and time for practical questions (N)	- A re-design was implemented for the second day of pre-launch event (N).
	Official language of project (N)	- some unclear terminology (N)	- A component was added into design to deal with the term 'comprehensive' and other vague terms (N).
Project Launch, Year One	35% budget parameter for small grants	- sites seeking clarity	- The parties concerned at a national level were brought together to clear up ambiguities and agree on a spectrum of acceptable strategies. Though this meeting helped to move the grants strategy forward this particular 'knot' required more ongoing attention and follow-up from the DE than what it received (N)
	- blending of the Research and Developmental Evaluation	- uncertainty about reporting and Social Analysis Tools (SAS) (N)	- Along with the Lead Researcher the DE's were coached o facilitate sessions using SAS tools (N)..
	Relationships between IICRD, the Foundation. and the Conv. Orgs.	- need more time to get grants out - sense that the delay in approving the final sites has caused a breakdown of community participation (N) - relationship building necessary between IICRD and one new	- A suggestion was made to the Foundation to extend the deadline for granting and reporting (N). - A meeting was convened and facilitated to relationship build, The meeting resulted in strengthened relationship going forward between ICRD staff

		site	and the site concerned (S).
	DE Learning Calls	- appreciation for the forum for feedback on practice	- The calls were continued and one-on-one coaching calls were added on an as needed basis.
Thirst for Action - late in year one and into two	Youth involvement	- thirst for action - difficulty in some sites on how to link with marginalized youth for granting	- All the DE's were repositioned to support decision making and processes related to granting (N). - The DE's shared ideas with the sites and facilitated strategy sharing between sites (N, S). - After a difficult national gathering the DE encouraged a staff member of the National Convener to reach out to new youth voices (N). - DE's facilitated and guided the selection of youth for the youth grant selection team (S).
	Partner involvement	- sense that the delay in approving the final sites continues to be a cause of limited community participation (N) - uncertainty on how to facilitate partner participation - lack of partner involvement	- Interviews to gather perspectives were conducted and then the findings were shared with the organization's ED (N). - The DE's encouraged an exchange of ideas between sites on methods of engaging and recruiting partners. - A strategic meeting was arranged between a city politician and staff of the National Convener during a site visit that was instrumental in securing significant additional funding (S). - The DE spent an extended period focused on coalition building amongst community partners (S).

	Relationships between IICRD, the Foundation and the Conv. Org.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - anxieties directed at the 35% budget parameter - misperceptions, misunderstandings, discouragement, disengagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The DE conducted short check-in interviews to clarify the situation then summarized the findings to the Foundation and IICRD. - A suggestion was made to the Foundation to directly link to the sites to clear up ambiguities and misperceptions (N).
Reinventing Structure - Year one and two	Partner involvement at community sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of sense of direction for YS in some sites - Steering Committee breakdown and partner disengagement (S) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The DE;s concerned assisted in the creation of new decision-making process in two sites. - The DE's assisted with bringing voices back to the table (N). - New approaches to processes for meeting facilitation, vision building, and group planning were executed (S).
	Positioning of DEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - problems with the acceptance of two DEs (N) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The DE conducted two site field visits to establish common ground for the Developmental Evaluation (N),
	Youth involvement HR issue @ National Convener Relations between IICRD and Convening Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - uncertainty with where to direct attention for granting - limited impact of one national role - poor exchanges between sites and person responsible for communicating with the sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some DE's were repositioned to support processes of grant selection committees and to generate ideas about supporting grantees (N & S). - Short check-in interviews were conducted to clarify situation (N) - A meeting was convened with key personnel of IICRD to pose questions regarding their roles, The meeting resulted in the staff concerned taking self-responsibility for proposing some staff changes (N).
	HR issues at sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - difficulties stemming from staff performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal and external interviews to clarify the issue were conducted. The intervention resulted in change of key staff position (S). - In separate case, the DE was

			and ED were coached on ways to build on strengths of a key staff person (N,S).
Clarifying relationships and support – Year two	Partner involvement and youth involvement	- some uncertainty with where to direct attention for granting and support of grantees - some experimentation	- Some of the DE's were repositioned to support decision making and processes related to grant support (N).
New activities for DE's - Year Three	positioning for the DE's for Year Three	- check-in with each ED with IICRD Program manager - IICRD and some sites have desire for their involvement in story collecting	- A new context specific role was articulated for each DE in cooperation with the ED's and IICRD Program Manager.

4. Developmental Evaluation – not always easy to have around

- we are here to 'help' is a loaded word

The community sites were variously challenged, frustrated and appreciative of the Developmental Evaluation. In a number of circumstances the evaluation challenged core program operations. One community staff member reported, "I think overall the number of layers of oversight with this initiative makes people uncomfortable." The presence of a DE as part of a small team during the early stages of an emergent project brings with it the risk of people feeling sensitive and vulnerable. With the real time nature of Developmental Evaluation, decisions of YS community staff were 'evaluated' with a frequency and intensity uncommon with more traditional evaluation methods. An unease with a sense of being watched was felt most acutely by the YS Coordinators. These contracted staff had the majority of the responsibility for realizing the programs aims on the ground.

There were significant challenges with the DE position in two of the community sites. One site required a repositioning of the DE in light of particularly difficult dynamics between the Coordinator and the DE. Though this DE demonstrated a level of competence I deemed quite sufficient for the role, due to circumstances at the site they were not able to effectively execute the Developmental Evaluation. The DE eventually chose to leave the position. In the second site there was for a period, significant personal dynamics with a key position in the project that blocked the DE from executing their role. The situation was resolved when the staff person was eventually dismissed. In both sites the ambiguity on the focus and personal dynamics contributed to the DE being unable to conduct their work effectively.

Feedback on the Developmental Evaluation role from the staff at one of these two sites has not been positive. As one can expect there are multiple perspectives on why the Developmental Evaluation at this site was considered unsuccessful. In respect of the privacy of the individuals concerned and with consideration to the purpose of this report, I will not delve into these various perspectives in this report. I will however with an objective of sharing the learning, unpack the context of the Developmental Evaluation at the site concerned.

It is relevant that the DE at this site had a greater number of hours dedicated to the job than any of the other sites. This contributed to a sense at the site of being constantly watched. The Executive Director expressed to me, “We would have preferred a more external person who would come and use their time efficiently when we requested it.” There is merit to this suggestion and indeed it is this approach that was taken successfully in two other sites. However, this structure was not articulated during the tenure of the DE concerned. It is this kind of positioning and focus that in the future must be clarified at the outset of a project. My own reflection on the situation is that the Developmental Evaluation at the site concerned may have been far more successful had the agency picked up on the DE's initial efforts to draw out long-held institutional knowledge and ideas held by individuals still associated with the Convening Organization but that for various reasons was not readily accessible or integrated into the work of the YS Coordinator.

5. The DEs Learning Organization

As discussed earlier in this report the group of five site-based DEs was facilitated as a learning organization. The quality of the exchanges and learning in this group has been significant. One DE reported on an evaluation, “I agree that the learning/exchange was significant...the group was very supportive while continuing to push our individual and collective learning edges”, another shared, “I enjoyed the sense of learning community with the DEs, in fact that was what initially drew me to the role (it's newness, the commitment to challenge and learning).” The team has met on a regular basis by phone and four times during the project in person. One of the face-to-face meetings was a 2-day residential learning retreat hosted and facilitated by this writer. Though it was obvious during the project that the learning about Developmental Evaluation taking place for the group was high, the existence of the group nevertheless created some anxiety for other YS community members.

‘The DEs’, as the team of six was commonly referred to, were, in the perspective of the broader YS community, a part of and at the same time a separate system to YS. At different times there was a sense of the DEs being an exclusive unit. When you throw in the fact that it was common knowledge that the DEs exchanged stories with one another about their sites, the feeling of unease that surfaced from time to time from within the broader YS community is understandable. Though items discussed by the DEs were done as so in the

context of facilitated learning exchanges for the purpose of improving DE practice at the sites, and adhered to a strict code of confidentiality and respect, nevertheless at various times topics sensitive to individual(s) in the sites were being discussed. The dynamic this created led to one Coordinator sharing with me, "Everything is so secretive I don't like that. It's like the DEs sit at a higher moral ground." On a similar note an ED from one of the Convening Organizations shared with me: "When the DEs form a group and have reflections on their own I wish they were more involved with the group."

6. DE Accountability

Though the question of the DEs accountability did not become a public issue within YS it was a contentious question during the first national gathering of YS in Boscoville. During the Social Analysis Systems (SAS) led evaluation of the national YS systems it became clear that at that point in the project's development, some of the Coordinators had concerns with the role of the DEs and how they were or were not being held accountable. When one considers the intervention function of the DEs, the Coordinator's questions regarding accountability are quite reasonable. A DE can have a great deal of influence on the direction of a project. As stated earlier in this report, a coordinated positioning of YS's DEs helped alter the overall course of the project.

A critical point that must be clarified is the line between a DE intervening and a DE interfering. The accountability practice employed for YS's Developmental Evaluation has played an important role in keeping the sense of interfering in check and maximizing the effectiveness of interventions. The accountability practices outlined below illustrates the multiple layers of accountability practice utilized for YS's Developmental Evaluation:

i) *Bi-monthly DE Group Check-ins:*

A safe space with DE peers where their past, present and future work can be vetted. This became an important vehicle of support for the professional development of the DEs and their collective practice. The DEs asked for and received feedback on a variety of issues drawn from their sites. As Lead DE I facilitated these discussions and they were recorded in note form by the lead researcher. The conversations followed a code of confidentiality and as such the notes from these meetings were not distributed beyond the DE Team.¹

ii) *Lead DE with Individual DE Conversations:*

¹ DE Call Notes - These notes have been drawn on to inform this report and the YS research.

During the first 1.5 years of the project these conversations were conducted approximately once per month with additional conversations on an as need basis. As the project advanced, check-in conversations with me as Lead DE decreased with the exception of two sites where a new DE was hired later in the project. The check-ins allowed the exploration of issues and questions of practice at a more specific and deeper level than what could be accomplished in the group DE call.

iii) *Lead DE checking in with Coordinators:*

As Lead DE I checked in formally and informally on a periodic or as needed basis with site Coordinators, some more than others, for their perspectives on the Developmental Evaluation at their site. I also attempted to be available to the Coordinators to discuss the Developmental Evaluation. I made it a priority to maintain open communication with Coordinators at two sites that experienced issues with the Developmental Evaluation.

iv) *Lead DE and Executive Directors of the Convening Organizations*

As Lead DE I periodically checked-in with the Executive Directors (EDs) of the Convening Organizations to discuss the DE role and its positioning. Check-in conversations took place when there was a concern or issue that required my particular attention. More formal check-ins with the EDs in an interview format at various points of the project also took place. I also made it known to the EDs that I was available at any time for consultation.

v) *Lead DE and IICRD YS Team:*

As Lead DE, throughout the project I had frequent check-ins with members of the IICRD Team. During the first 1.5 years of the project these check-ins were more frequent as I assisted the team in dealing with various national issues.

vi) *Lead DE and the YS Project Researcher:*

The YS Project Lead Researcher and I worked very closely together in the design and execution of the research and Developmental Evaluation to assure a coordinated effort of data collecting and support of program development. The Lead Researcher joined the group DE learning calls, as an observer and note collector and to discuss processes for data collecting that required the input and/or involvement of the DEs. When appropriate the researcher served as a learning partner for my own DE work and interventions.

vii) *Lead DE and Senior Program Officer at the Foundation:*

As Lead DE I had regular contact, both formal and informal, with the Senior Program Officer responsible for YS on behalf of the Foundation. These check-ins served as a reporting mechanism and when appropriate as another sounding board for my own work and interventions.

viii) *Double-looping data:*

At those times when as Lead DE I had observations that could lead to a significant intervention for the projects development I would execute a series of strategic conversations to challenge and clarify this perspective. This process is known as double looping data.

ix) *Lead DE Reports and Writing:*

- *Q&D Report #1, March 2006:*

A pre-site selection reflection on the overall project design, the intervener role, ambiguity clarification, review of learning from Vibrant Communities, and comments on the IICRD staff role of Youth Community Developer.

- *YS Launch, June 2007:*

Reflections from the Sydney, B.C. pre-launch event, design of the event, training the DEs experientially and their positioning, and the dynamics of trying to transfer 'ownership' of YS

- *A Report from the Developmental Evaluator's Desk, Nov. 2007:*

Reflections on the first national YS gathering, the importance of 'gatherings', the IICRD's role as intervener and SAS.

- *Growing the Common Space at YS, Nov. 2008:*

A document intended to challenge the YS community to use a more appreciative approach to their interrelations in the project and by posting it on the TiG (Taking It Global) website, to stimulate initial use of the site.

x) *The Social Analysis Systems Evaluation:*

During the 1st National Gathering of the YS community in RDP, QC an evaluation of the Developmental Evaluation was included as part of a facilitated SAS evaluation. The results of the SAS evaluation caused the Lead DE to increase the layers of accountability for the Developmental Evaluation.

Regardless of the number of check-ins and the diversity of individuals involved, these practices of accountability for the Developmental Evaluation were only as good as the empathetic and active listening practiced by the one conducting the check-ins. As Lead DE all of the practices of accountability listed above -

except for the SAS evaluation - were executed by this author. The degree of unsolicited feedback I received from a number of sources at a number of levels of the project, gave me some indication that on the listening and facilitation front my practice was appreciated. This however is not sufficient evaluation or feedback.

Recommendation: An independent and confidential evaluation tool to monitor the performance of a Lead DE and site-based DEs should be used in future projects of this nature. Such an evaluative tool could be introduced as part of the regular reporting from community sites.

There is another level to the practice of accountability that cannot be addressed with a process of reporting or double-looping data that must be thrown into the mix. It has to do with the role of leadership that is part of a DE's work. The role of DE can have a great deal of influence on a project and it cannot be denied that there is a function of leadership inherent in the role. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to have a person in the DE role that fully understands in practice what it means to be a 'Servant Leader', a concept developed by Robert Greenleaf, (1970). For Greenleaf the principle of an effective leader is that they first look for ways that those that they come into contact with will feel better about who they are and what they contribute to make a difference to the whole. I'm not suggesting it is a DEs role in any sort of superficial way to make sure everyone in a program feels good about what they are doing or that difficulties and underperforming personnel can be smoothed over. There will be times, as there was with YS, where it is clear having attempted appreciative interventions with certain individuals that their involvement in the program is having too great of a negative effect on the program culture. I do however think it important to understand the need for a DEs first orientation to be strength-based, watching for opportunities to highlight what is working before what is not. It is through an appreciative lens that a DE has a far better chance to help a program more effectively get past its 'knots' and onto relevant learnings. Developmental Leadership as Servant Leadership lays a filter of accountability over the practice that maintains its focus on the core intent of the team of individuals that steward the development of a project.

7. The Careful Dance of Developmental Evaluation and Action Research

As identified in the growing literature on CCI, interventions involving innovation call for inter-linkages between research, planning, evaluation, and action (Chevalier & Buckles, 2006; Torjman, 1999). Research becomes a tool to support the self-discovery of individuals, build community, and more generally serve as a catalyst for change (Reitsma-Street, 2002). Research as a collaborative process serves to help actors move projects forward as communities become part of the assessment (identification of issues and variables), analysis (planning and goal identification), and action. An alliance and ownership of the research process allows communities to re-assess courses of action on an ongoing basis.

YS's research design carried forward much as it was planned within the original research design framework. As Lead Development Evaluator, I worked closely with the Lead Researcher in designing and implementing evaluation and research tools throughout the project. A close and collaborative working relationship has been essential for the emergent development of a unique methodology for evaluating; analyzing and developing the YS project. At times the DEs were placed in what one might consider more of a research function than that of a DE. For example, this was the case when they facilitated interactive evaluation sessions using Social Analysis Systems (SAS)² tools modified by the Lead Researcher and the Lead DE. However, it should be noted that these sessions served as both a reflection for those leading the YS project in the communities and as a tool for collecting valuable research data to better understand the overall patterns of the project's development and impact.

The Action Research component of this project was embedded in YS communities using two primary mechanisms: 1) a DE was tied to each community site working in collaboration with the Lead DE and the lead researcher; and 2) the development and application of participatory analysis tools in the communities. While the DEs focused on feeding back lessons, questions, and understandings into the system directly, the action research component of this project took a more macro perspective, identifying themes and patterns that can contribute more broadly to knowledge development. As a result of this, the complementary practices of Developmental Evaluation and Action Research have risen to the forefront in this YS initiative as an innovative and effective methodology for the emergent nature of systems change initiatives and CCI. Furthermore, the application of a Developmental Evaluation and Action Research with the YS project has shed light on the difference and complementary nature in purpose and in approach of the two methodologies. The distinction between the two methodologies parallels what Gloster (2000) describes as a distinction between 'ar' and 'AR', with the former concerning the immediate analysis-feedback loop and the latter a reflection of emerging patterns resulting from planned interventions and unanticipated events.

In this final year of the project a number of the DEs have moved into a role that more closely resembles the role of an action researcher. A specific story collecting and writing role has been undertaken by each DE to support the project's dissemination function. This shift was to be expected with the use of Developmental Evaluation being more relevant to the context of high program emergence. The shift in roles for the DEs was discussed one on one with each of the EDs, the IICRD Program Manager and the Lead DE. The DEs will continue to maintain their more traditional DE functions and practice as necessary.

² Social Analysis Systems - an international initiative supporting learning and dialogue grounded in action. Through a community of practice, website and publications, the initiative provides access to an integrated collection of practical tools and strategies for collaborative inquiry, planning and evaluation in complex settings involving multiple stakeholders. The tools and strategies are theoretically informed, fully participatory, flexible and relevant to many sectors and fields of study.

8. Post Project Reflection with DE Team

In November 2009 in Victoria, B.C. over dinner the DE team sat down together to look back on their role with YS. This was mid-way through YS's final year, at which point all of the DE's had made the transition to a new role to support their sites. The team talked about what they learned, how the role changed their professional practices, what impact they had and what they would do different next time. The impacts component of that conversation has been incorporated in the chart on page 61 of this report. Following are the highlights of the reflection:

"I learned more about:

- how to be alert to where the energy in a project is;
- helping to create conditions for gradual growth versus an explosive change;
- how to be more like a mid-wife versus a doctor;
- principle-based leadership based on an agreed set of principles (YS Guide Post);
- a way to identify the priorities of what to pay attention to at the beginning of a project;
- I learned to be more strategic with my time;
- how to step back and be more critical of my own quick judgments, it - helped me practice humility;
- that the phrase, "we are here to 'help' is loaded;
- challenging my assumptions and therefore making better decisions;
- reflective practice and how it can generate new insights all the time."
- in comparison to other evaluation methods I feel DE was the better medicine

"What I would do different about DE next time is:

- have a better introduction at the beginning of the project to DE, especially preparing us for the feelings of resistance we were to experience from the group;
- have a design to go by, perhaps a framework to know what to watch, a learning framework that would embrace the change along the way,
- prepare us for how the YS's Guide posts Post can help us with places to pay attention to along the way;
- have an understanding of the difference it would make to have the role imposed versus being asked to come;
- prepare us for the fact that when this work gets into personal development how it gets more sensitive;
- have a review of the available tools at the beginning of the process;
- help the communities to know more about the role;
- set out with some tangible outcome measurements;
- is not have both the research and DE functions in the same project;
- change our use of language, 'research language and evaluation' are heavy words;
- use the body of knowledge we now have about DE to contribute to the development of practice, we need compelling stories to communicate what is DE;

- there was value added doing this DE as a team;
- have only external DE's, this seemed to be a stronger platform than being an internal DE."