

Executive Summary: Youth Philanthropy Initiative

Purpose Statement

This summary seeks to outline the goals, major elements, and distinctive characteristics of the Youth Philanthropy Initiative. Founded in Tulsa, Oklahoma, YPI has been part of a growing movement across the country to equip teens with the understanding and tools necessary to become social entrepreneurs since 2004.

What is YPI?

The Youth Philanthropy Initiative makes social entrepreneurship concrete and sustainable. Teenagers participate in a three-year program focused on a community project of their cohort's choosing, and they become experts in a particular area of philanthropy through research, organization, and long-term planning.

Who is YPI?

One student defines the Youth Philanthropy Initiative as “AP Life.” YPI is today's best students addressing clear needs of their peers—from education to mental healthcare—and developing into leaders in their communities, better prepared for academic, professional, and emotional challenges they will face in college and beyond.

Why do YPI?

Youth Philanthropy Initiative provides a unique environment for teenagers to become their best selves. By making the program as student-led as possible—while retaining a sense of accountability among themselves and with their YPI coaches—YPI participants learn to see community building as not simply a hobby, but a way of life.

YPI and the New Social Entrepreneurship

Although millennials are often noted for their social engagement and passion for a variety of issues affecting the world, many of them lack an organizing principle to put their ideas and interests into effect. The concept of philanthropy thus remains abstract and intimidating.

Rather than leave these experiential gaps unfilled until the college years, local community leaders can channel this energy into a program that enables high school students to participate in something larger than themselves and connect with a diverse group of like-minded individuals at similar stages in life.

Participation can be described as “youth in governance,” which MacNeil and McClean (2006) characterize as different from “youth leadership development” in this way: “There is a significant difference between learning about leadership and learning leadership. Learning leadership happens experientially, through involvement in opportunities to practice the skills, experiment with approaches, and try on the roles” (p. 99). In other words, a youth-in-governance approach focuses on creating opportunities for youth to practice leadership.

YPI as an Incubator for 21st-Century Leadership

The Youth Philanthropy Initiative is one form of this approach that is proven to be an effective, sustainable answer to the question of how community leaders can turn potential into action. YPI is a youth-led program in which a diverse group of local teens experience what it means to be a grant maker, change-agent, and leader. The participants are given seed money and the task of addressing a specific issue in the teen community; rather than being assigned a topic, they go through the process of choosing the project as a group, then put it into effect and take further steps to ensure it will last after their time in the program.

Students who commit to and participate in YPI have the opportunity to take perhaps loosely defined interests or passions and transfer them into clearly defined goals that promote lasting change in their communities. They gain practical and invaluable lessons alongside other students and learn from supportive role models. Teenagers discover how best to cultivate their talents through a comprehensive series of steps that make them better prepared to become leaders wherever they go.

The benefits of YPI fall under our key aspects (Philanthropy, Leadership, Self-Knowledge, and Community Building) and the major vehicle for building those traits, Social Entrepreneurship:

Philanthropy:

- Access to a wide network of nonprofit and philanthropic professionals
- Get to channel strengths and skills in a positive way

Leadership:

- Develop research and presentation skills

- Cultivate decision making and critical thinking skills
- Practice event planning

Self-Knowledge:

- Improve time management and personal organization
- Increase sense of confidence and unique contributions one can make to the community

- Build self-awareness and self-efficacy
- More extensive college preparation
- Students are treated like adults as much as possible so they'll be better prepared to be adults
- community—both within and across cohorts at different levels of the program
- Acquire positive conflict management skills
- Gain wider exposure to students from different walks of life, creating a more extensive network of high schools around the community

Community Building:

- Group work on projects focused on a concrete goal
- Mentorship and role models
- Close personal and professional connections with fellow members in an affirming, sustainable
- Also promotes more interaction and engagement with students outside the program

Why YPI Stands Out

YPI's curriculum is unique largely because of its consistently student-led components; throughout the program, students take charge of beginning and directing their projects. This kind of autonomy requires sustained energy over a longer period of time than a semester or school year; rather, YPI participants must be able to envision their ideas both within the scope of their three years together and beyond their project's completion to ensure it will produce lasting outcomes.

This experiential perspective on leadership involves not only practical concerns, but also personal ones. When students learn by doing, they sometimes learn by running into conflicts—either between fellow members or as a result of determining their own priorities and managing multiple commitments.

Graduates of YPI frequently comment on how formative this program is to their sense of self and community. They are able to gain skills and experiences that other students often aren't exposed to until after college. YPI graduates consistently express how they have advantages over their peers because of their ability to organize and execute complicated projects. Participants in the program are treated as adults. As such, one of the greatest benefits is the ability to work with professionals. YPI recognizes that teens are experts in regards to the challenges and culture of being a teen today. This puts them in a position to understand the challenges teens face better than most

adults could. Participants in YPI learn about their unique talents and this helps them navigate college major and career choices to find their unique calling.

A crucial aspect of YPI is the emphasis it places on full participation in and commitment to all aspects of the program. Students cannot try it out and change their minds after a few meetings, or make excuses to get out of doing their share of the work. Rather, they know from the beginning that YPI will be part of their lives for three years and must continually make it a priority. As YPI-ers spend this time together, supporting each other both within the program and in their individual lives, they cultivate a spirit of engagement that leads to experiences (and results) that last. By turning philanthropy into an organized activity, teenagers gain meaningful insights into how doing good in the world around them can be feasible and tangible and leave with a sense of agency to pursue it on their own.

Why Your Community Needs YPI

YPI partly began in order to improve the community's typical perceptions of teenagers and millennials. By demonstrating the vast potential of today's youth, the program has an elevating effect on others that also becomes contagious among students' larger networks and primes other people to be thinking in similar ways. In a professional context, YPI helps create a pipeline for young leaders into the community that not promotes further change and helps launch careers. The host institution benefits from YPI's presence as well, as supporting the program creates visibility and demonstrates tangible support of youth and civic life. Community organizers can recruit YPI alumni in the future, which leads to further partnerships and funding possibilities on both ends.

Your Next Steps

If you want to see social entrepreneurship given the same legitimacy in your community as other extracurricular activities, YPI will provide the tools and support to make philanthropy a reality as substantial as programs like robotics and debate. For more information, please contact Adam Seaman or Terrie Shipley.