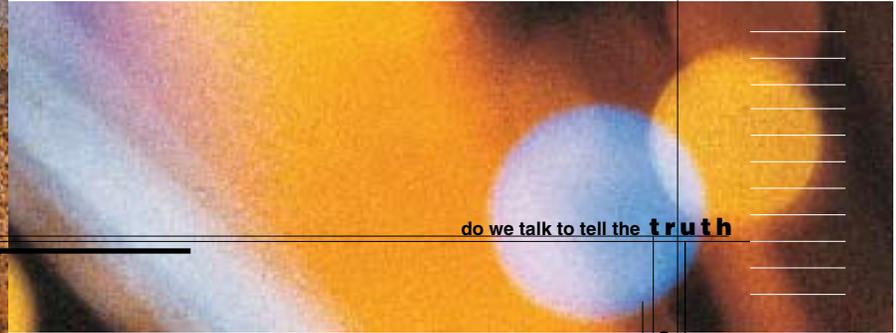




red is the  
sound of my  
voice ...



do we talk to tell the truth

or do we speak to be heard?

conference  
report

july  
2006



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# Introduction

Despite sharing a common humanity, people often have trouble communicating across generations. The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development maintains that “all across the nation, there is increasing recognition of the capacity of young people to be involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects and programs relevant to their needs and issues. But engaging young people as partners in program development often places adults in unfamiliar and even uncomfortable positions. The

Providing a bridge between youth voice and adult ears is kind of the essence of a "youth media movement."

way we have interacted with young people over the course of our lifetimes established patterns of behavior that are extremely difficult to modify. As a result, many adults say or do things that make being a true partner with young people extremely difficult.”<sup>1</sup> This problem seems to have grown larger between young people and adults in our modern world. Because we can select the information, news, and entertainment that is carefully crafted to target people by demographic groups, young people and adults live in and are exposed to different worlds. Even so, both older and younger people recognize the enormous value partnerships across age bring to work as important as social change. Wisdom, energy, experience, and new ideas are all enhanced when the generations converge in pursuit of a common goal. Remaining is the question of what we can actively do to help this convergence along so that we can work together for social change across the generational divide.

In July of 2006 the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (the Foundation) convened a group of young people and adults together to begin a discussion around the question, “How can we get young people involved in social action, and how can we use youth media to do it?” The goal of the conference, Connect + Shift → Link: Youth Media for

Social Change (CSL), was for invited participants and Foundation staff to have a mutual learning experience around how youth media producers can connect with foundations and other groups seeking to involve young people in their social change work.

The Kellogg Foundation was represented at the conference by staff from many of its departments. Participants who were not Foundation staff came from 43 different organizations. The bulk of participants represented youth media groups from across the country; other participants were from the Foundation initiatives Kellogg Leadership for Community Change and the Youth Innovation Fund. The conference was a day and a half long and consisted of three main parts:

**Media Scavenger Hunt:** Participants were broken up by the conference facilitators into predetermined small groups and were set off to find two pieces of media placed for them. All of the media pieces were produced by the various organizations the participants belonged to and were sent to the Foundation prior to the conference. Once they reached their rooms, the groups found the media piece; watched, listened or read it, and then responded to a list of questions related to the overall goals of the conference. Responses were made either on a computer, voice recorder, or digital video camera. This event was structured to allow participants some time to get comfortable with each other and discuss issues; it was a warm-up to the Open Space Discussion, summarized below.

**Open Space Discussion:** This was the “meat” of the conference. The conference facilitator began the discussion around the core theme question presented to the participants: How do we get young people involved in social action, and how do we use youth media to do it? Spirited discussion followed, and 20 discussion ideas emerged. After consolidating and giving the ideas spaces, participants chose to attend the three discussions that interested them the most; the person who shared the idea was responsible for leading the discussion.

**Skill Roundup:** The Skill Roundup was a peer learning session led by participants at the conference who had a particular expertise and record of success. Nine different skills that people had expressed interest in learning were offered; participants picked the sessions that interested them most and rotated sessions every 15 minutes. The skills featured at the Skill Roundup were spokesperson training; music production; slam poetry/spoken word; grantseeking tips; community media production; community radio; blogging; music videos; and alternative press.

Working collectively, young people can have much impact and offer new perspectives.

<sup>1</sup> *Creating youth-adult partnerships: Training curricula for youth, adults and youth-adult teams.* Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development. 1996.

<sup>2</sup> See Open Space Technology at <http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-Openspace.html>. Retrieved August 8, 2006.

# Background and Context

Young people have historically been both leaders and participants in social change movements in the United States. Young people were involved in shaping major events determining the future of the country before it was even an independent nation, and that tradition has continued through the Civil Rights movement, the demonstrations around the Vietnam War,<sup>3</sup> and most recently, the voices of younger people have been heard loud and clear in the immigration debate taking place across the nation<sup>4</sup>. In recognition of this tradition and of the value of including young people in its work, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has included a youth leadership and/or youth engagement component in much of its funding. There is a desire now among many in the Foundation to take this work even deeper, and to learn more about how to work with youth and connect with them through communications. And, youth media has been recognized as one of eight paths that serve to engage youth as leaders and in partnership with adults in community and social change work<sup>5</sup> – media that is created, imagined, produced, and distributed by youth, often in partnership with adults. This interest and energy was the impetus behind the inception of Connect + Shift → Link: Youth Media for Social Change.

Much of the upsurge in technology and social networks that's taken place in recent years has caught the world of philanthropy by surprise. Most of the staff here don't have iPods, or use text messaging, or have a MySpace account. These technologies (and those that will replace them in the presumably near future!) do represent exciting ways to share ideas, tap into new social networks, and advance social change around the world. We wanted to learn what some of the best ideas are about getting young people involved as active change agents. CSL was a time to learn with each other and talk over great ideas so that all of us are equipped with new knowledge that we can use as we do our media work and/or community work.

There is something pure about the beliefs of young people who are willing and motivated to fight for what they believe is right.



<sup>3</sup> Youth engagement: A celebration across time and culture, framing the issue. W.K. Kellogg Foundation. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Navarro, Mireya. "Taking to the streets, for parents' sake." New York Times: June 11, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> The other seven paths are youth research and evaluation, youth service, youth leadership, youth decision-making and governance, youth philanthropy, youth civic and political engagement, and youth organizing. From Youth engagement: A celebration across time and culture, framing the issue. W.K. Kellogg Foundation. 2005.

## What Happened: Emerging Issues and Ideas

The following sections are snapshots and summaries of the discussions that happened during the conference. To write these summaries, all of the written, audio, visual, and recorded oral conversations were analyzed and compiled. The materials came out of the Media Scavenger Hunt; Open Space Discussion; Skill Roundup; various report-out sessions of the conference; and a post-conference evaluation. If you would like to see the original sources, you can read, view and listen to the highlights on the DVD provided. You'll also find a complete list of topics proposed for the Open Space Discussion as well as the rough notes taken by participants during each session on the DVD.

### Getting Involved: Youth Ownership and Leadership

Conference participants discussed two overarching themes that they felt might help to increase the number of young people getting involved in community and social change. They felt that if youth owned or had a stake in the outcome of a particular aspect of the community, they might be more inclined to step up. Building off of this, they also worked to define what it meant to have a youth-driven process in social change work; in many cases, it's not enough that the youth own a piece of the project – the best results can be attained if youth lead

the process while getting help from others. A youth-led process can lead to great collaboration between young people and adults; it gives adults

good practice at letting go and offering support and guidance when it's needed and helps to show young people what their roles can be in the decision-making process. This way of working gives everyone some practice at communal versus individual work. Furthermore, some young people at CSL expressed during discussion that it would be very helpful if they were allowed by adults to try to lead even if they fail. "I actually think we need to fail sometimes," one of them said.

Participants felt that as young people think about how to begin to take one effort to change their communities, good ways to foster the sense of owning the issue include working to establish youth review boards for newspapers or other important communication outlets in the community and learning and training others about digital storytelling that can help to revive waning cultures. Many communities are finding that digital storytelling is a great way of finding the connections that exist among one another as people tell their personal stories about the people, places, and events of their lives.<sup>6</sup>

Media is an appealing way for young people to begin "owning" a process. It allows voices to be heard and because people are listening, the importance of the issue is amplified. Several young people also expressed that the cutting edge nature of doing media work was appealing as part of the process of community involvement. But the youth that attended CSL are the proverbial choir. Groups also brainstormed some ideas about how to activate young people who aren't using their voices. They felt that it would be useful to continue efforts to inform young people about community issues through more use of youth media, but to go about it differently. The message needs to be re-crafted and said in a young person's way. The mainstream messages about youth are getting in the way of what young people want to say, how they feel, and who they are. Again and again, young people reiterated that the best way to reach others, and the way they were reached, was first through information imparted by someone they respect. So, the message needs to not only reach youth, but also teachers, those in the middle years between "adult" and "youth," and other influentials. (See subsection "Getting It Out" on page 5 for further discussion on this topic.)

### Roles and Responsibilities of Young Media-Makers

Lively discussion took place in several different groups at CSL around whether or not youth media makers should try to present a neutral stance or if it's okay to show a bias. There were also discussions about what it means to be a media activist, and what kinds of responsibilities that role entails. Some participants felt that one advantage young people enjoy is the ability to ignore the categories of journalism versus activism, but others felt that taking advantage of this ability only further contributes to the common misperception of youth media as substandard to mainstream adult media.

Some argued that one of the strong points of many youth media pieces was that they didn't try to hide their bias by pretending to have created a "neutral" piece that simply "reports" on the issue. If the media piece comes right out and shows an opinion, at least audiences will know what the creators are thinking. They maintained that adult reporters do have biases; they just don't think they're biased in their reporting but the questions they ask and the stories they cover betray that bias. Adult reporters are thought of as the invisible hand, but they

There is so much value to be found in the process of participating, which is a life-long process.

Back on the res, we wanna change the direction of the children.

You become an activist when you choose which story you're going to tell. Neutrality doesn't exist.

are human and have opinions. The participants questioned why it is seen as an inherently negative thing to have an opinion and be blatant about expressing it. Some felt that it is more honest than claiming to report neutral information and were not interested in adopting this aspect of mainstream communication simply because it will lend youth media more credibility in the mainstream. We don't need to get young people to play into the way it's done now if we disagree with it.

<sup>6</sup>Read more at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_storytelling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_storytelling). Retrieved August 9, 2006.

Also, you may view and use the digital storytelling toolkit created by the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development at <http://captura.llanogrande.org/>.

## Youth ask questions; they don't interview.

Format alone  
can select audience.

However, others attending the conference that did want to be seen as activists argued that in the long run, youth media makers need to see and present both, or many, sides of issues and felt that a pitfall with some youth media is that it does not cover enough of or explain enough of the issues. It is important to have an opinion but sometimes that needs to be balanced, and that will be determined by the situation

the piece is created for and the audience. They felt that presenting multiple sides of an issue is more like the way adults prefer to view media. Presenting one side seemed childish to them and they maintained that you could still create an activist piece without presenting just one side of an issue. Despite differing thoughts on the subject, the participants all felt that audiences of all generations need to be provided with context if the piece they are viewing is opinionated.

As the discussion progressed, many participants felt that they were touching on a possible niche for youth media: the presentation of opinions without ever trying to pretend that their views are objective. All acknowledged that the trick to doing this is to convey in the piece that your opinions are well-informed.

This moved the conversation into the roles of youth media:

The major roles of youth media as interpreted by this group are:

- 1) to pick up on stories and issues that the mainstream media is not covering;
- 2) to responsibly challenge the mainstream media created by adults;
- 3) to educate and inform youth and youth educators.

### How We Hear It, Tell It, and Get It Out

#### Hearing It

Youth are in a unique position to reach people and hear a different story. Those involved in this discussion felt that this position comes mainly from two places. First, young people don't have a concrete view about how the world works and what people are like. They are in the process of figuring things out, and when they talk to someone about their experience they will ask questions, while adults will interview. The difference between these two things is that young people are exploring the person's life and inviting them to tell their story as they experience it, while the "adult" way of hearing a story is to figure out how the story flows into a predetermined structure. Second, participants felt that it is easier to give an honest answer to youth because young people do not represent a penalizing danger of authority the way, for example, a CNN reporter might. There is a perception that young people will not twist your answer; other youth are especially more comfortable dealing with youth reporters. When speaking with adults, many participants maintained that answers are sometimes changed to fit the response that an interviewee feels an adult reporter might want to hear.

What stories are youth interested in hearing? Young people are interested in learning about the nation and world, but local issues are more personal and often feel more accessible to work on; young people feel like they can make a real impact on local issues. And it is possible to then connect these community concerns with national and/or global problems.

Where do youth get their information? Beyond personal accounts, where do youth get information about the world? Many at CSL want to know more from schools and teachers; they feel that most teachers avoid real issues and that's why it's hard to get young people to

pay attention and give respect sometimes. They report learning a lot from older peers. Many of them mentioned that they read the BBC online or watch it on TV to get their information, and many watch The Daily Show on Comedy Central instead of watching traditional American newscasts. Internet sources are also a major way of getting information but no specific outlets were mentioned. It was stated over and over by many participants that young people don't watch public access TV or listen to public radio or NPR. In fact, when discussing a story, one participant said that "this story was geared toward the NPR audience; it wasn't for youth."

#### Telling It

First-hand stories are powerful for both young people and adults. It is powerful to hear one person's story, which can inspire dialogue to begin. That's how we grow and understand one another.

We are similar in this way; this is a human truth. But for youth, discussing ideas in stories and in artful ways (spoken word, music videos, etc.) feels more real and reliable to young people than news stories or reporting does. Many felt that adults could respond to more artful forms of communication, but pointed out that they felt adults respect balanced, informed arguments, so if you're going to use humor in your piece you need to be informed first if you're ever going to reach an adult. Many participants agreed that a piece does not have to be oriented toward social change to bring about change; the awareness just talking about your experience brings is helpful because it begins a dialogue. Some felt that this was part of their call to do youth media – to be a bridge for others who feel isolated and alone with their experiences. When young people watch a media piece that has a call to action, they agreed that they want the specifics: what is the conflict and what is the opposition? What do you want us to do about it? What has already been tried? Where do I fit? Some of the participants said that they need to do better in telling this complete story.

Where do I get my news?  
I watch The Daily Show...  
that's where I get my  
news.

### Getting It Out

Many participants were frustrated with their efforts to disseminate their pieces and build audiences because they feel that the biggest hurdle to reach many young people who aren't involved is education.

They brainstormed some ways to improve dissemination:

- 1) Documentaries can be shown to mayors, city councils, schools, and friends - friends will help create connections and start spreading the word.
- 2) Use public access cable. There was disagreement about this idea because people without cable can't watch it, and many felt that it reaches only those who purposefully watch it already anyway.
- 3) Some wanted to try creating PSAs.
- 4) Get your media shown in public schools.
- 5) Simpler is better - don't try to overproduce with spinning boxes and other crazy editing effects because it cheapens your piece and turns outlets off from picking it up.

The bottom line? The more it connects to our lives the more we'll care about it. Make your media relevant to those who are watching it; this may mean creating the same piece in different ways to reach different audiences.

Participants also reported in the post-conference evaluation that they felt collaborating with one another better in the future would be a key

way to grow and get their information out. They want to connect with one another and feel

a need for future convenings and workshops to network more with each other and learn from one another. Participants listed many tools that they already are using and are ready to share with other groups

**It's powerful to hear someone else's story and important for dialogue - this is the only way to grow and understand.**

**I need to know what to do so I'm not immediately discredited because of my age.**

and provide training for, including media as an organizing tool; media production and literacy training; documentary film-making; digital storytelling training; spoken word training; using the Internet more effectively, etc. To view all of the responses, please read the post-conference evaluation report included in the CD.

### Raw Truth vs. Amicable Confrontation: On Audiences

The topic of censorship and reaching adult audiences was in the forefront of many people's minds at CSL. The struggle many young media makers face is not

so much about how to tell their story the way they want

**I'm blessed with the ability to confront people amicably.**

to tell it, but how to make sure that intense or strong pieces don't turn potential audiences off. They wanted to figure out how to turn their anger about some social issues into more "amicable confrontation." Some acknowledged that without profanity in media, it's easier for adults to listen to youth. If we want people to listen, especially older people, we have to find a compromise, they said. To capture older

**If you want people to listen to you, you have to find compromise.**

audiences we must offer several perspectives and sound less defiant. And, others pointed out, the problem is not just with strong language, but also with youth lingo. Breaking down youth language or explaining what terms mean will make pieces more accessible because not everyone knows the new slang and vernacular. Youth creating media and adults that are supporting them need to work together to provide a bridge between youth voice and adult ears.

Youth speak raw truth; there is an honesty to youth media that is smoothed over in mainstream media. There is a balance we can strike that will preserve that honesty but make it a message everyone can absorb. Sometimes what we have to say is hard to hear, but it may

touch on someone with the same experience because suddenly they realize they aren't alone. This is one of our responsibilities and one of the great things about youth media that we can't lose in trying to gain audiences. Some offered that thinking about the purpose of a piece as it's being made - whether you are trying to include people in a discussion or rally people for a cause - will help influence the direction you take in creating the piece.



**Sometimes it's hard to hear what we have to say but it touches someone else who has had the same range of experience. Then they realize they are not alone.**

We go into classrooms and ask kids if they have an opinion and nobody raises their hand. It's unbelievable, but it's because they don't know how to say it. Once we teach them how to express themselves, they suddenly all have an opinion.

### Youthful Rebellion as an Avenue for Social Change

A group of participants sat down during CSL to discuss how youthful rebellion can be harnessed or validated as real social change. The group broke "rebellion" down into two basic types: destructive and constructive/productive rebellion. The difference between the two types boils down to moving from just being angry and against something to stating what you are for and then working toward that. This was the first building block the group identified as a way to answer the question. The four steps below are the roots for what this group thought could be a lasting way to harness youthful rebellion, as one of the concerns discussed early on was the "fizzle factor" – people get mad and protest about an issue when it comes to a head, and then the movement dies even if nothing has really changed except that the issue has faded from the public spotlight.

How can rebellion be harnessed or validated as real social change?

- 1) Rebellion needs to be nurtured and channeled to constructive ends – challenge young people to answer not just what they're against, but also what they're for. The creation of media and other social change work should happen around this pro-concept instead of the typical anti-concept.
- 2) Educators and peer mentors need to teach rebellion as a social process; they may have to be trained first.
- 3) Allied adults need to trust in the awareness of the age group; constantly work to remember yourself at that age.
- 4) Document the process of using rebellion for social change so that it can be repeated and improved by others, and also to give the young people working for change a way to see and measure their impact to keep them fired up.

### Thoughts on the Youth/Adult Disconnect

During the conference there was a brief discussion around one particular question: why is it hard for youth and adults to work together sometimes? The young people at the conference offered some of their insights into why they often find it difficult to work with adults. They said they often see a conflict of interest; they feel that they are working for quality of life and justice for people, but see adults around them as caring about business and economic concerns, which they said they are not interested in. Others took this thought further and ventured that young people listen to their intuitive sense of right and wrong; they do not take into consideration what something might cost in dollars to address if people are hurting or if something is unfair. Many conference attendees said it seems like adults trivialize their views and don't respect young people. Young media makers said that adult audiences view their media as less worthwhile because they don't think young people could have informed opinions, and instead put all of their stock into mainstream media.

Whenever I tell an adult they need to bring the information to my level, they assume I need it dumbed-down...but they're missing the point. When I say that I need it at my level, I mean higher, not lower.



Ok ok, with age comes experience. But not necessarily wisdom!

To me, when you think about the idea of diversity, we should really be thinking about embracing differences, not just about differences.



### Dealing with It: Stereotypes and Assumptions

Negative stereotypes and assumptions is a hornets' nest issue for young people. Young people feel stereotyped by the mainstream media and by adults. Participants at CSL grappled with this issue and some of the related problems they see associated with it.

Below are some of the assumptions and stereotypes they feel they are labeled with, and that they see as negatively impacting them:

- 1) Adults think we are so influenced by the media that they can solve young people's problems with a music video.
- 2) Adults think we are mind-numbed youth consumers.
- 3) Politicians and people in power make assumptions about how to solve problems involving young people, but they never listen to youth, the streets, or the communities – they don't even know how to.
- 4) Funders assume what issues are important to youth media makers, and pressure is put on them to create certain kinds of pieces in a certain way. This is stifling.
- 5) Youth assume things about other youth - white youth assumptions vs black youth assumptions, urban youth vs rural youth, etc. For example, some at the conference said that urban music motivates and excites youth and should be used in youth media; others argued back - just because you're under 25 doesn't mean you love hip hop.
- 6) Adults impose their adult values on youth by constantly emphasizing that young people need to be "active" and "engaged" – why can't we run around and play any more? Why is that a waste?

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I don't get it: instead of getting protection, I'm the one getting protected from.

7) Youth media is not "real" media. It's not as informed or well-done or reliable as mainstream media. The general perception is that youth media is not "complete" enough to be valid; older and younger people both feel that youth media-makers lack experience, expertise, and education. Because of this assumption, adults seem to get excited when youth are doing anything, regardless of the quality. But we are capable of more. We are capable of producing work that is of high quality; our age shouldn't be an excuse to create work of low caliber.

8) Young people are perceived as having one area of expertise about which they can speak with authority: youth issues. The reality is that their interests are often on other community-oriented issues and they address problems that are intergenerational. Young people need to

be seen as larger actors in the community rather than actors just working for a youth movement; it is unfair to pigeonhole young

people as only being active around youth issues. Just because I'm 16 or 18 or 20 doesn't mean that I'm a "youth representative" – I'm a person living and working in the community.

In fact, the Foundation's post-conference survey of the individuals and organizations attending found that the people in attendance worked on and were interested in a vast range of social issues including education; environment; food systems; health; human services such as substance abuse, housing, teen pregnancy; youth civic engagement and violence prevention; rural development; and social justice issues such as racism, poverty, and immigration. It's very clear that young people are not interested in advocating only for themselves.

Red is the sound of my voice  
But when we talk,  
It is gray,  
Stifled by the radio waves.  
Do we talk to tell the truth  
Or do we speak to be heard?  
My gray voice goes everywhere,  
But in my heart I still feel red.  
Red is the rawness of reality.  
Gray is the limit of what others can hear.



Assumptions do not get to the core of any problem; they are a lens that we look through that will bring us to a comfortable solution where some group can blame somebody else for a problem. What are some of the ways youth media and young people in general can address these assumptions and stereotypes? In general, discussants agreed that the solutions we develop need to be long-term and proactive as opposed to reacting to what we don't like. We have to stop feeding the negative things by responding to them, because what we feed will grow.

To combat assumptions we should:

- Create a message from the youth to other youth and spread it virally on the Internet.
- Young people need to own their media – and not just in the new, jargonized sense of ownership – we need to literally and monetarily own it.
- Get better at marketing our media – more people need to know about it and it needs to be more accessible. Capitalize on the incredible linking availability we currently have in society due to the Internet. We could do things like use tools like promotional DVDs that link to organization websites. This is cost-effective and gives people something tangible they can use.

— Work to reduce the gap between what's cool and what's educational – young people can take the reins on this.<sup>7</sup> The shift from cool to educational needs to be more gradual; it's not like learning isn't interesting, it's just generally presented in a really boring way.

— Craft our visual and verbal messages more intentionally and thoughtfully so that we don't keep triggering the same stereotypes. We'll need to experiment with different ways of phrasing the message, and can use research work that has already been done on this.<sup>8</sup>

— The term "youth media" tokenizes us and plays into the assumption that our media is somehow different, removed from, or less-than-mainstream media. We can't control what others call us, but we can drop the "youth" label ourselves – this isn't a youth-produced documentary; it's a documentary!

Controversy ensued when the subject of youth ownership of media moved to taking media to scale and trying to reach a larger, perhaps national, level. Many felt that doing this would entail navigating the terrain of co-option of youth media by groups who would sponsor an event. Many participants brought up the 2005 New Jazz Philosophy Tour, which was sponsored by Kool. This was an event featuring many cutting edge, socially-minded musicians, yet in order for the Tour to be taken to a large scale, they needed a financial sponsor. How, many wanted to know, would you take youth media to a larger scale

without using Kool or other companies that both the media creators and the audiences would prefer weren't around? Does this change the stories we can tell? Does taking it to a large scale matter? What is the intention of our media? Most people in the conversation agreed that there was a sacrifice to be made as audiences get bigger and the production grows in scale; the creators will have to define what the opportunities are and decide if that sacrifice is worth it.

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Once you tell the story, you  
start to own the experience  
and you then become responsible  
for making something good  
happen.

<sup>7</sup>Youth Speaks' website was offered as a reference point for reducing this gap—they have more on their website that is interactive and interesting rather than just organizational information. See their website at [www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org).

<sup>8</sup> See the research and work that the FrameWorks Institute has done of framing youth issues for the public at <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/youth.shtml>.

### Rural Issues and Youth Media

Rural communities experience the same types of problems that most people typically associate with urban areas: high unemployment, substance abuse, poor education systems. Rural areas are also suffering from substantial out-migration, especially of young people. Distance is a big challenge for anyone in rural areas and youth media-makers are no exception to this. There is also a technological gap in homes, schools, and libraries in rural areas that increases the challenges faced by young people making media. Despite all this, youth media producers in rural areas are becoming spokespersons for their entire population, rather than just their generation.

Those involved in this session discussed how to create incentives and opportunities for rural youth to remain in their communities and become invested in creating positive change; it feels as though there are more urban participation in the field of youth media. Youth media can improve their services and participation by getting the word out more about their programs and distributing their work; radio is a valuable, affordable and accessible medium in rural areas. Some other ideas and potential solutions put forth included intense Internet organizing (more than just having a website, but creating a space where there's an idea exchange that is smaller and more well-defined in scope and in audience); addressing the need for positive role models and leaders in rural communities; identifying and connecting with allies who are working on rural and/or youth media issues; addressing the negative stereotypes about rural areas and the romanticized vision people have of life in rural America through youth produced media.

Knowing who you are and where you come from builds a lot of strength in yourself. People don't know who to be cuz they don't know where they come from - they should be who they wanna be; they should be themselves.

I mean  
 We could all kind of relate.  
 In our community:  
 The way a turntable sounds like a fiddle.  
 How blues guitar sounds like heavy metal.  
 But in our homes we see the same kinds of stuff -  
 From Coal Fields, Kentucky in Appalachia  
 From a reservation in Seneca, Saginaw, Chippewa  
 From Carson City, Nevada, the Washoe  
 From Oakland, California  
 From Winona, Mississippi, in the South -  
 We can all relate.



## What's Next?

On the final day of the conference, after the conclusion all of the events, everyone came back together in the same room. We received a small piece of paper and were asked: what's next? What are you going to take away from this conference and do? The following are the ideas and commitments of the organizations represented at the conference, but they are published here as idea stimulants for you. Take them and adapt them for your own use.

*Diversify our media outlets in the following way:*

- 1) Alternative Press – expand leadership to include former community residents and use online donations to keep our program running.*
- 2) Expand the community voice into community radio, done in collaboration with the school district.*
- 3) Explore the public access TV option.*

*Follow up on integrating exchange with other youth producers into our outreach and action plans. Keep finding ways to work with community members on sharing media and talking about it*

*We plan on using a lot of alternative press back home. We're going to try to cultivate relationships and network with the local media and also make our community aware of the type of media that we do. We are also going to propose to our organization doing a call to action for our local government and different municipals. We will try to collaborate with the other organizations that were here on media projects using the Internet.*

*Get involved in community radio because it would be nice to have an all-youth radio show that addresses problems and issues.*

*Go home and tell people about this experience and together we'll figure out how to incorporate social change through youth media into our work.*

*Educate people about Willie Lynch and his speech; and educate teens on subvertising and how it can flip our perceptions of products and companies from what they want us to think.*

*Do my best to raise consciousness and awareness in my community to counter psychological bondage!*

*If people are buying "virtual real estate" with real dollars inside multiplayer online games, couldn't the movers of a social movement also message within multiplayer online games? This would reach a whole new audience.*

*Explore moving from solely print to video and other media. Explore ways to make our process of storytelling more participatory and focused on community involvement.*

*Follow through with media being programmed at my school to help with some of our vocal talents such as singing and getting involved with music, which might bring positive ways to get music and bands involved with media. We are even considering making our own music for the radio station we are trying to set up.*

*I would like to build a media center dedicated only to media and nothing else. I would want to build it on the reservation and it would be open to everyone. I think it would be a great way to keep the community involved and it opens up more doors for the students. And: As an adult, I will support the idea for the open-to-the-public community center program for media purposes. I would also like to start a slam poetry group at our school.*

*Continue to figure out how to take cell phone text messaging and social networking sites to the next level; they were used by young activists in the recent immigration protests. How can we take it further?*

*I've become more interested in youth media. I would like to make my own music and beats.*

*I would like to have an umbrella organization where the other organizations are all linked up through one web page.*

*Take our campaign to hold media outlets accountable for biased and negative images of young people and promote more positive images of young people in mainstream media to a national level by identifying allies in all 50 states.*

*1) Engage local youth video programs to help develop media about leadership and what kind of leadership they feel is needed at this time.*

*2) Figure out how to better archive media connected to KLCC programs, making some available to the public.*

*3) Connect with smaller media outlets regionally to get our story out.*

*Learn about subvertising<sup>9</sup> as an alternative media format. If one of the goals of your organization's media program is to help young people become media literate and expose the truth behind advertising and other media, you could use subvertisements as a way to teach young people about what's behind the images they see; the satire and parody of many subvertisements is hilarious, and humor is a great teaching tool.*

*From now on, I'm going to make a plan for my documentaries before I start shooting them!*

<sup>9</sup>Using a well-established logo to create a new message; usually used as a guerilla tactic in anti-corporate messaging. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subvertising>.

*I was truly inspired by the open space sessions because we talked about kids growing up too fast, environment, race, media, and also assumptions. I would like to start an environmental group but we would do things for the youth and do media talking about jobs, environmental politics, and what problems we see today as the new teens.*

*I want to get a practice voting station at my organization to teach youth how to vote. I want to start a letter writing campaign to our representatives letting them know the issues important to us. I want to start doing spoken word in my girls' group.*

*We want to do three things:*

- 1) Create a blogging or MySpace account for our organization;*
- 2) Bring two of the other participants at the conference to our city for a spoken word workshop; and*
- 3) Build relationships with a radio DJ in our community to create a space for youth time.*

*I will bring back all the information and notes I've written down to my organization for the next project. I will add the slam poetry link and certain music production links into our website that we have been creating this summer. And, using what I learned about blogging I want to try to create some kind of blog on our website.*

*All the information I gathered on the last day was most beneficial to me and our organization in one way or another. But one that I can really learn from that would be a great tool to know is how to be a better grantseeker. My organization needs grants every year. It's how we survive and keep our other side projects alive.*

*Organize a petition to persuade a record label to give an artist with a social change message a record contract. Get mainstream media to work for young people.*

*I think radio is a good way to get things out on the reservation about tribal functions and other events. I myself am going to try to use my grantseeking tips to fund the radio program. It would also be a good way to get some of the local artists' stuff out as well.*

*Contextualization is an important part of the learning process. After the conversations here, it has become clear that when students have a context for their work, the end result is richer. The plan is to partner with other youth organizations to enrich training by hosting workshops taught by partner organizations.*

*We want to use youth video training to reach the youth in the city and to record youth-related events and create our own shorts. Then we want to start a vlog with these videos. We want to use our video production program to create more activities for youth in our community. We hope to broadcast on the radio as well. We plan to stay connected to this group!*

*I will continue to document and use my media experience and video production resources to publicize our accomplishments and efforts. I'm also going to look to outside resources beyond the mainstream media.*

*What about a website full of activist-oriented documentary shorts made on video phones? Or made with picture phones and then stories are written around the photos?*

*I am going to attempt a partnership with some of the organizations here and incorporate them into our Brave New Voices network.*

*I will begin collaborating with other organizations represented here that are based in San Francisco, and develop a closer working relationship with some in regard to shared space and Bay Area broadcasting programs.*

*We want to connect with the Boston folks and San Francisco folks for some media work.*

*We need to create an umbrella organization to keep this group in touch and growing. We can do this through a website with blogging, and has links to all the different organizations of this conference. We could post videos, trade tips on a message board, or post conferences and meetings on a calendar.*

*I'm going to do a music video about myself and use that music video as a profile for me on MySpace and post it on my blog. I want people to learn how to do this skill because it is very important to learn to share ideas and opinions; you can make music videos on any topic. I plan to teach this to my peers.*

*Radio has moved online in the form of free webcasts and podcasting – what's the next step that young people can take this to?*

*I will develop education idea sharing with another organization at CSL; connect with others here about computer gaming and social change; connect with some of the other Bay Area groups here for a possible Bay Area partnership; and I will go to a Youth Speaks slam!*

*This isn't really a commitment for action, but this conference has really bolstered my spirit. I have been impressed with the people at this conference. Everyone has been open, helpful, and resourceful. I realized how easy and simple it is to bring media to your issue. Many of the people here have not received formal training; they are just winging it and it's still working. This conference has been great for networking. It's inspiring to see what others have accomplished. I feel energized for my continued work back home.*

*I have learned how much video can promote your cause, so I plan to involve high school and middle school youth to communicate their ideas through media; you don't have to be a professional editor or video specialist. You can use simple tools to bring about serious change. It was cool to meet amazing people who are all working to promote positive change and I was really happy to network with them.*

*To promote CultureShock 07 (!) we want to try and use radio and try to use what we've learned from the slam poetry/spoken word workshops to get into school classrooms and educate teens on expressing themselves through poetry.*

*As a communications major I'm going to try to support and encourage youth activism through my writing and use the connections I've made to help with this revolution! As for the lawn service, we're going to think about starting a blog because of the blog session!*

*You don't have to be thinking "in the box" when you're thinking about using media to engage young people. We need to make a conscious effort to stay on top of the emerging or new forms of media, or just the new ways to use the already-established formats. It's important that young people learn how to use the standard media formats, but the ability that young people have to innovate and use media in new ways is limitless.*

*We want to keep in touch with other organizations about a "media watchdog" project; find different ways to activate youth in Portland to be passionate about getting their voices heard; and share ways of reaching different media outlets in order to gain public support and community interest.*

*We simply wish to exchange and network with the other organizations here. This has been an eye-opener; there's so much out there!*

*We want to use our website as an alternative press outlet; post poetry on our youth site; and follow up and foster partnerships with all the groups we met.*



## Summary: What We Learned

What did we learn? What didn't we learn that we wanted to? What did we learn that we didn't set out to?

There were several mutual learning goals that the Kellogg Foundation had in mind by convening this group of people from youth media and activist organizations for Connect + Shift → Link. Some of those goals were met by the conference, and others ended up not being met.

### Goal 1: Connections made among the participants.

Without a doubt, this goal was met. When everyone first walked into breakfast on Thursday morning, the atmosphere was very hushed with shy people sipping on orange juice and nervously looking around. After about ten minutes of this group gathering together, the meeting rooms were not quiet until they left. Participants and Foundation staff took every opportunity to talk with each other, network, and build new connections. The structure of the conference was such that every activity involved talking to people, sharing ideas, and engaging in debate. To capture the change, the facilitator performed the same "Degree of Separation" ice breaker at the beginning and the end of the conference. After the first ice breaker, he asked one person to stand and then instructed anyone who had had a conversation with her to also stand. He had to ask people to stand six times before everyone in the room rose. By the end of the conference when he asked a random participant to stand, over three quarters of the room rose when he asked anyone who had had a conversation with her to rise. Upon the second request, everyone in the room was standing. The degree of separation among the participants had fallen in a day and a half from six to two.

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Traditional definitions have to be thrown out of the window.

### Goal 2: Follow-up activities in the hopper as a result of the conference.

The "What's Next" section preceding this described the ideas and actions people wanted to pursue following the conference. While there was particular momentum just after the conference, what remains to be seen is whether or not there is follow-through on these commitments. As you read this report, it is our hope that these ideas will be rekindled and refashioned in the reader's mind to inspire you to action; in this way, the work of those done at CSL will continue on.

### Goal 3: Learn how young people get their information.

It's cliché by now to say that young people don't read newspapers the way previous generations did, and are even deserting television in favor of the Internet. Even though these vague generalizations point in a particular direction, specific information on where young people are learning about the world is still covered in fog. While it was certainly not a scientific process, we did hear observations about where young people get their information: interpersonally they get information from schools and teachers (who they in fact want more from) and from older peers. The media they consume is trickier. In off-hand comments, the BBC, Comedy Central's The Daily Show, and a vague reference to "the Internet" were all mentioned. To find out if this was typical of all young people and to get more specific information, an actual survey of some sort would have to be completed. Even the oft-touted and oft-maligned MySpace is falling out of favor due to its ownership; sites like YouTube are now becoming preferable. Just as Friendster was the social networking site before it fell out of favor for MySpace, MySpace will cease to be the "it" Internet spot once a newer/better/hipper site evolves. Adults who want to stay in tune with a younger generation are going to have to accept that this is a constantly changing environment. The good news, as we discovered at CSL, is that if you have a conversation and are willing to listen, young people will tell you about it.

### Goal 4: Learn what technologies we should be using to engage youth.

We already know that young people love to work with media – they love to express themselves on video, in music, in spoken word, and on the computer. It isn't that the technologies being used aren't hitting the right mark. What was heard in conversation at CSL is that if the philanthropy and non-profit communities want to get young people interested, they'll need to go to them, on the sites they frequent, and on their terms. It is the rare young person who does an Internet search to find out which organization's website features information about how they can get involved in a civic engagement program – but it's not a rare young person who is interested in figuring out how they can help change something about their community or nation that irritates them. If information on the issue and how to get involved is readily available in channels they already frequent, perhaps those with an inclination to activate will do so.

### Goal 5: Discover tangible ways to get young people involved in social change work: what motivates a young person to get involved, and what role can/does youth media play in that motivation?

We saved the hardest goal for last. Some of the young people at the conference flat out said that they didn't always want to be doing serious work: "Whatever happened to being young and running around outside?" one asked, "I don't always want to be 'engaged'." This is a fair complaint, and adults who work in the youth field should be prepared to let youth come and go and come back again.

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As a society, we are too comfortable. We recognize the need to struggle but say, "Oh, someone else is fighting that battle."

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## I like listening.

That said, there are plenty of young people who are ready to get serious when the time is right. Over and over at CSL, participants voiced their amazement about how they could meet another young person who just didn't seem to care, only to find out that it's because they didn't have the knowledge to form an opinion. Once young people start to understand and learn where to go to do something, it's much easier to bring them in. CSL participants lamented sugar-coated school systems that they feel keep them uninformed about the world, the nation and their communities. They discussed how they prefer to take in media: they like socially-minded videos and music and spoken word and multimedia and participatory media. They just aren't into straight-laced, buttoned-up, don't get too excited, read it and put it down kinds of communication. Aesthetic design is important. Figuring out how to incorporate response and collaboration for messages is key for reaching younger audiences.

Young media makers at CSL shared that they listen to the world in a different way. They hear a different story than adults do, and prefer to create media that's artful and heavily focused on personal stories and anecdotes. They also feel that their field, youth media, has

various roles and responsibilities that include telling unheard stories and making sure those stories stay as true to how they heard them as possible, regardless of whether or not that means it seems biased. These characteristics seem like a natural fit with the philanthropic and non-profit world; but as foundations and other organizations seek to involve youth media makers in their work, they will have to learn to let go of a certain amount of control in order to cope with this. One young person put it quite succinctly during a conversation about where youth media falls in the categories of activist or journalistic media: "We don't have to put ourselves in either category. We have almost been given a license to ignore those categories, and there are pros and cons to that."

Personal relationships are essential for youth involvement. There will always be young people who are extroverted and willing to seek out ways to get involved in a project and want to lead that effort without ever being prompted by someone else. But these people are the minority. Just like adults, young people need a network to help the world open up to them. Older peers, friends who are already involved, and teachers who take the time to teach beyond the classroom are all

important for involving young people; they are informers. If these informers don't know what's going on, young people won't either. These personal relationships spur young people to action; information from the Internet and other sources may help a young person to form an opinion or fuel a rebellious spirit, but it is the people around them that can help them learn how to channel that rebellion into changing the world for the better. As it was said during CSL, "We need to figure out how to be proactive instead of reactionary...nothing's going to happen until we figure out what we're for, what we want. It's easy to talk about what you're against and another thing to work toward what you're for." Youth media is a natural place for exploring the stories that emerge from the ideas youth have for working to change communities and the world: once you tell the story, you start to own the experience and you then become responsible for making something good happen.

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**Kalamazoo Slam Poetry Team**

**All participants, for their active co-creation of the conference**

**Participants were asked at the closing of Connect + Shift → Link: if you were an alien and looked down on this conference, what would you have thought about what's happened here?**

These people have Passion.

There's a whole lot of Diversity on this planet.

Creativity fills the room.

Human Interaction is energizing.

Art is inevitable.

There's no Stereotyping in this space.

Wisdom is alive here.

Whoa - talk about different Personalities.

Leadership is represented - by the leaders of now and tomorrow.

There's a lot of Good Eye Contact here.

Is this the sign of a Social Movement?

There's Hope for earthlings after all.





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