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# BUILD POWER, SHARE POWER, LEVERAGE POWER

How foundations can best support youth-led organizations and movements to amplify their impact.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Contributors

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For more information visit: [www.uwaterloo.ca/youthinn](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/youthinn)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction and methodology

Ashoka Canada's Foundation Academy for Collaboration ("The Academy") is an ongoing program of Ashoka Canada that is a peer-to-peer action learning space that brings together high impact social change leaders, philanthropists and community organizers, to listen to each other, learn together and collaborate on our country's most intractable systemic challenges.

The Ashoka Canada Foundation Academy for Collaboration on Youth Allyship, which is the second Academy hosted by Ashoka Canada had the following objectives:

- Connect philanthropic leaders and young changemakers in Canada;
- Gather insights on leading practices for youth engagement and supporting youth-led social and environmental impact; and
- Exchange and align around opportunities to collectively advance change

The Ashoka Canada Foundation Academy for Collaboration on Youth Allyship was stewarded by youth focused Ashoka Fellows, **Ilona Dougherty** and **Fabrice Vil** with organizing support from Ashoka Canada and had the following phases:

- Connect
- Gather Insights
- Youth Engagement
- Exchange and Align
- Co-Create

This report is the result of the Gather Insights phase of this project.

The research question that guided the development of this report is as follows:

How can Canadian foundations best support youth-led civil society organizations and youth movements to have an impact on social and environmental issues?

In order to answer this question, a systematic literature review was conducted. After a broad search to identify the most relevant academic and grey literature that speaks to this topic, 41 articles were selected to be read and then deductively and inductively coded.

In addition, in order to ensure youth voice was at the center of this research, 16 young people were identified and selected to be interviewed. Selecting these young people was done through a media search that allowed the authors to identify a wide range of diverse young leaders who are beyond our own networks to be considered for an interview. By conducting a media search, we aimed to identify underrepresented voices and avoid only selecting young leaders who are frequently spotlighted and repeatedly given opportunities. Through this media search, 177 Canadian young leaders were identified, a diverse group of 55 young changemakers were invited to be interviewed and 16 accepted our request for an interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

After the interview was completed, a brief survey was sent to interview participants with questions related to demographic characteristics.



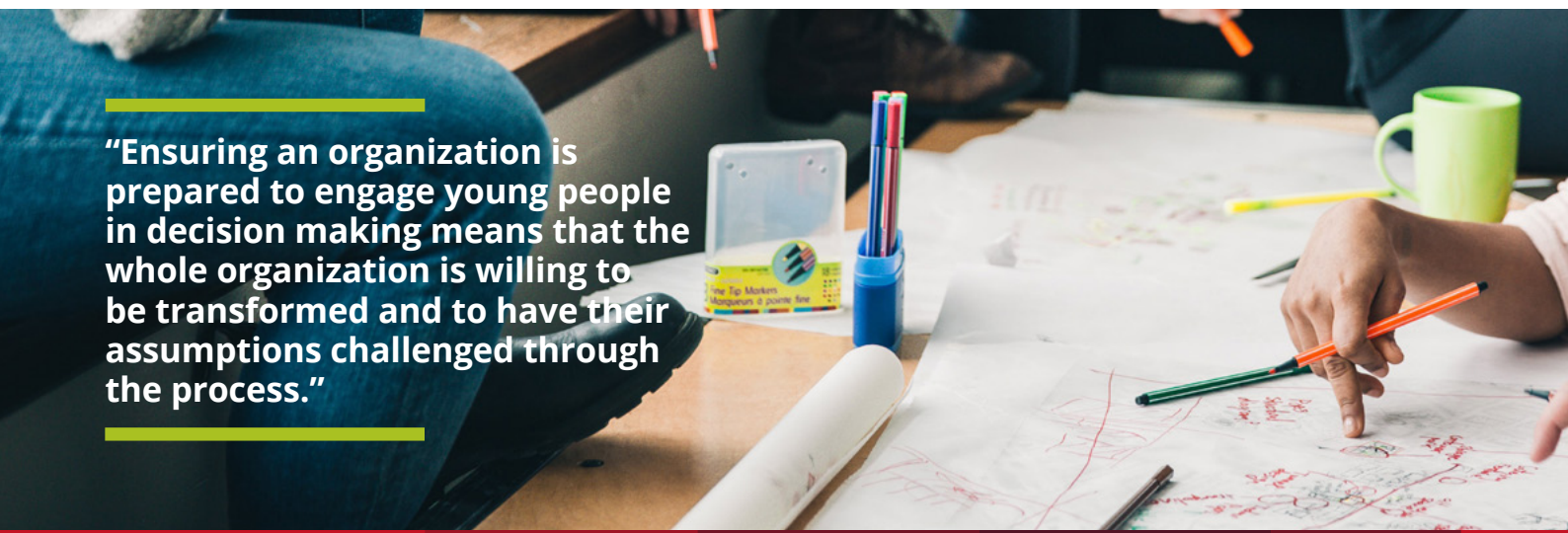


## Results

### The key findings of the literature review are:

Leading practices in engaging young changemakers and/or next generation philanthropists in the governance and decision-making processes of foundations are as follows:

- Foundations commit to an equal partnership with youth-led organizations and movements by sharing the control of grant making decisions equally with young people as well as by designating the time and resources needed to build trusting relationships with young people;
- Foundations commit to an ongoing examination of how power and control impact decision-making within the foundation and leverage the foundation's power in such a way that existing power structures both within and beyond the foundation are challenged in support of grantees work;
- Foundations are prepared before engaging young people. This includes the leadership and staff 'buying in' to diverse, equitable and inclusive youth engagement, meaningful intergenerational collaboration and valuing young people's unique abilities, and attitudes and stereotypes about young people being proactively addressed;
- Foundations establish adequate structures for youth engagement and allocate appropriate resources. This includes embedding youth engagement within the formal structures of the foundation as well as providing on-going financial and staff support;
- Foundations enact a robust recruitment strategy that goes beyond engaging the 'usual suspects' by prioritizing recruiting 'hard to reach' young people as well as young people with strong connections to community;
- Foundations dedicate the time needed to establish relationships between adults and young people that center belonging, trust, and space for discomfort and ambiguity;
- Foundations ensure young people are prepared for their involvement and supported throughout with thoughtful emotional support, a balance of safety and support as well as choice and challenge, just in time training, and ongoing mentorship;
- Foundations ensure young people are given the chance to make real decisions, take ownership over mission critical tasks and have a meaningful impact;
- Foundations ensure young people engage with the wider community through intergenerational collaboration and by embedding young people's work within a wider network of support; and
- Foundations regularly gather and share data about youth engagement efforts and regularly integrate feedback received.



**“Ensuring an organization is prepared to engage young people in decision making means that the whole organization is willing to be transformed and to have their assumptions challenged through the process.”**



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**“Issues of power, control, and decision-making need to be examined throughout the philanthropic community.”**

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Leading practices in how foundations can support youth-led organizations and youth-led movements need to amplify their social and environmental impact are as follows:

- Foundations commit to an equal partnership with youth-led organizations and movements by sharing the control of grant making decisions equally with young people as well as by designating the time and resources needed to build trusting relationships with young people;
- Foundations commit to an ongoing examination of how power and control impact decision-making within the foundation and leverage the foundation’s power in such a way that existing power structures are challenged in support of grantees work;
- Foundations support convenings and youth-led networks; and
- Foundations improve granting practices by providing adequate and long-term funding to youth-led organizations, providing training on technical, financial and project management to young leaders, youth-led organizations and movements, providing clear and simple reporting guidelines as well as by committing to regularly fund organizations without charitable status.

The interviews provide a picture of what foundations can do to better support youth-led organizations and movements, the key findings from the interviews are as follows:

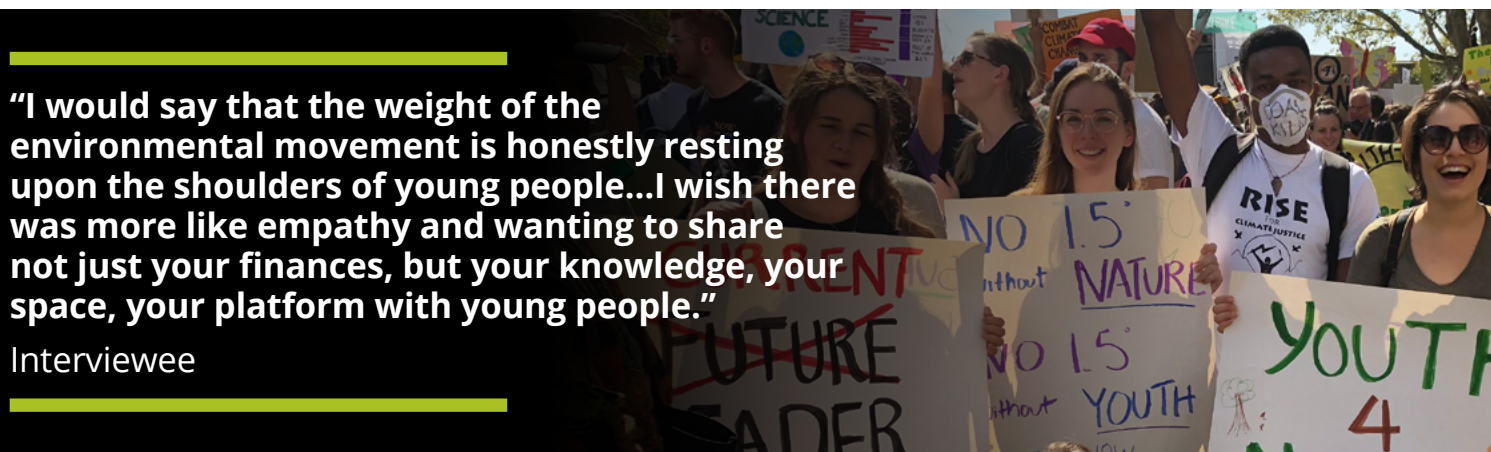
- Provide more funding specifically to youth-led organizations and movements including:
  - Offer larger funding amounts for youth-led work;
  - Ensure that funding is sufficient so that young people working in these organizations and movements are paid a living wage;
  - Provide general operational support;
  - Fund work that is usually considered radical or political;
  - Fund organizations without a formal structure and non-profits who don’t have charitable status;
  - Provide funds for therapy or access to a therapist as part of grants;
  - Fund opportunities for cultivating joy and rest amongst young leaders; and
  - Ensure funding provided is flexible.
- Work in partnership with young people when making funding decisions;
- Work to address power imbalances within the foundation and use the foundation’s influence to work to address power imbalances between young people and adults in civil society, government and society more generally;
- Support the convening of young leaders;
- Disclose where the foundation received its money on the foundation website to create a more transparent relationship between funders and potential grantees;
- Better promote funding opportunities to ensure they reach a wide cross section of young leaders, young-led organizations and movements; and
- Offer opportunities for creativity and flexibility in reporting requirements.

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**“I would say that the weight of the environmental movement is honestly resting upon the shoulders of young people...I wish there was more like empathy and wanting to share not just your finances, but your knowledge, your space, your platform with young people.”**

Interviewee

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# Insights

By reviewing the latest academic and grey literature as well as conducting interviews with young leaders we were able to identify key insights that help answer the question that is at the core of this research: *How can Canadian foundations best support youth-led civil society organizations and youth movements to have an impact on social and environmental issues?*

Flores and Fierle-Hedrick (2021)'s work is a useful framework to use to describe how best to meaningfully support youth-led organizations and movements to increase their impact, we have adapted it for this purpose in the following way:

## Build power

- Ensure adequate and dedicated funding for youth-led organizations and movements on young people's terms with an emphasis on funding youth-led work that has traditionally been perceived by too radical or political and funding youth-led work led by equity-deserving communities;

## Share Power

- Engage young people as decision-makers in the granting activities and governance of foundations with a focus on engaging young people from equity-deserving communities and those with strong connections to community; and

## Leverage Power

- Use foundations' influence to address power imbalances between young people and adults in civil society, government and society more generally;

## We expand on these three insights below:

### Build power

Through the interviews it became clear that in order to best support youth-led organizations and movements more funding specifically earmarked to support youth-led work is needed. In particular funding that is granted on young people's terms with an emphasis on funding youth-led work that has traditionally been perceived by too radical or political and funding youth-led work led by equity-deserving communities. Tangible changes that should be made to granting programs identified in this research are as follows:

- Organizations and collectives of young people who are not charitable organizations or incorporated non profits are eligible for funding;
- Larger funding amounts and longer term funding is available specifically for youth-led work;
- Funding that allows youth-led organizations and movements to pay a living wage and cover other operational costs is readily available for youth-led work;
- Funding for youth-led work that has traditionally been perceived by too radical or political is readily available;
- Funding for youth-led work led by equity-deserving communities is readily available;
- Funding for therapy or access to a therapist for young leaders and those working in and with youth-led organizations and movements is offered as part of grants;
- Funding for cultivating joy and rest amongst young leaders and those working in and with youth-led organizations and movements is readily available;
- Funding criteria as well as reporting requirements are transparent, flexible and allow for creativity, and foundations ensure there is a staff available to work with young grantees to explain and adjust these requirements as needed;
- Networking and convening for youth-led organizations and movements is supported by funders but led by young people; and
- Technical, financial and project management training is available to young grantees before, during and after they receive funding.





## Share power

Power can be shared by meaningfully engaging young people as decision-makers in the granting activities and governance of foundations. A focus on engaging young people from equity-deserving communities as well as those with strong connections to community to ensure that young people engaged are not just representing themselves but can offer a broader perspective is key. Leading practices to facilitate meaningful engagement in this context are:

- Foundations commit to an equal partnership with youth-led organizations and movements by sharing the control of grant making decisions equally with young people as well as by designating the time and resources needed to build trusting relationships with young people;
- Foundations commit to an ongoing examination of how power and control impact decision-making within the foundation and leverage the foundation's power in such a way that existing power structures both within and beyond the foundation are challenged in support of grantees work;
- Foundations are prepared before engaging young people. This includes the leadership and staff 'buying in' to diverse, equitable and inclusive youth engagement, meaningful intergenerational collaboration and valuing young people's unique abilities, and attitudes and stereotypes about young people being proactively addressed;
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- Foundations ensure young people are given the chance to make real decisions, take ownership over mission critical tasks and have a meaningful impact;
- Foundations ensure young people engage with the wider community through intergenerational collaboration and by embedding young people's work within a wider network of support; and
- Foundations regularly gather and share data about youth engagement efforts and regularly integrate feedback received.



## Leverage power

Foundations' own power can be leveraged to support youth-led work by foundations' using their influence to address power imbalances between young people and adults in civil society, government and society more generally. Leading practices to leverage power include:

- Foundations working to ensure that adult leaders in social and environmental change movements and organizations value young leaders, youth-led organizations and movements and that they collaborate with them and support them;
- Foundations advocating to ensure that other funders, in particularly government, build and share power with young people including adhering to the leading practices outlined above;
- Foundations fund research to address the gaps in knowledge identified in this research:
  - Research to benchmark the current state of youth engagement practices by Canadian foundations; and
  - Research to study the impact of funding and in-kind support currently being offered by Canadian foundations to youth-led organizations and movements.





## Critical shifts

The results of the first Ashoka Academy outlined a need to shift from the current state of “citizen voices – especially the voices of disenfranchised youth – are not driving decision-making within government and institutions, to a future state of “citizen voices – notably from young people – are supported, organized and strengthened to enhance their agency and move decision-makers.”

In order to achieve this shift, after reflecting on the research outlined in this report, Ashoka Canada Foundation Academy for Collaboration on Youth Allyship members propose that the following critical shifts:

Current State	Future State
<p>Youth-led organizations and movements do not have adequate funding.</p>	<p>Adequate and dedicated funding for youth-led organizations and movements is available on young people’s terms and is trust-based. This includes funding for activities that have traditionally been perceived by too radical or political including advocacy, lobbying and protest, funding to support mental wellbeing and joy and funding work led by youth from equity-deserving communities.</p>
<p>Young people are not consistently or meaningfully engaged in a decision-making role in the granting activities and governance of foundations. When they are engaged it is usually limited to an advisory role.</p>	<p>Young people are consistently and meaningfully engaged as decision-makers in the granting activities and governance of foundations. This includes diverse young people directly making decisions about what issues and causes funding will be directed towards, how funding is allocated as well as decisions surrounding the operations of the foundation including decisions related to governance and human resources.</p>
<p>Power imbalances between young people and adults are common and widespread.</p>	<p>Foundations are using their influence to advocate for other decision-making institutions to collaborate with young people. In particular foundations are working side by side with young people to ensure that power imbalances between young people and adults in adult-led non-profits, government and society more broadly are addressed.</p>







## Recommended concrete actions and conclusion

For the exchange and align as well as the co-create portion of this project, a draft version of this report was shared with Academy members and young leaders and in October - December 2022, three sessions between took place with both Academy members and young leaders. The first was a daylong session in Montréal and the next two were virtual. The ultimate aim of these sessions was to explore opportunities to experiment and/or collaborate on shared priorities.

Out of these sessions came three ideas for concrete next steps that the young leaders and Academy members believed could be taken collectively to support the critical shifts outlined above. While the leading practices outlined throughout this report can be implemented by individual foundations, the three ideas below are meant to be viewed as collaborative projects that a coalition of foundations, youth-serving organizations, young leaders, youth-led organizations and movements may consider advancing together. These ideas are initial brainstorms that would need further fleshing out:

1. Create youth-led fund and/or invest in and support existing youth-led funds.
2. Supporting foundations, civil society and government to improve their youth allyship practices through an education series and resources.
3. Create intergenerational gathering spaces where young leaders, youth-led organizations and movements have access to support and decision-makers.

The results of this research, echo the findings of Ashoka Canada's first Academy. This research shows that young leaders in youth-led organizations and movements are calling for similar action to what social innovators in general are asking for from foundations namely:

- "Build sustained, trusting, and collaborative partnerships with grantees.
- Share decision-making power over funding.
- Funders should use their voices to confront...inequities" (Ashoka Canada, 2020, p. 8)

The difference being that there is even a larger power imbalance between young people, especially those from equity-deserving communities, and funders than there is between adults in social and environmental change organizations and movements and funders.

Young people are often at the forefront of social and environmental change movements, offering more radical and political perspectives that push us to go further than adults are comfortable going (Dougherty & Clarke, 2018; Ho et al., 2015). In a time of rapid change and increasing urgency to address social and environmental challenges, this push to go further and act more quickly that is coming from young people, is exactly what is needed.

If we hope to address the social and environmental challenges we are all facing, working in intergenerational collaboration with young leaders is not only necessary it is an imperative and it should be prioritized.

In order to effectively do so, we need to build power in youth-led organization and movements, share power with young leaders and perhaps most importantly, leverage our own power and influence to address broader systemic barriers to intergenerational collaboration.

