



**Civil Society and Testing Change Project - Youth Engagement Workshop  
July 14, 2016, New York City  
Summary Notes**

Introduction

The workshop started with an introduction by Bonnie Koenig of the Civil Society and Testing Change project. She briefly described the CS&TC project as (1) **Focused on the operational changes that many civil society organizations (CSOs) will need to make to stay relevant** amidst some major external changes. (which may include engaging youth in decision-making, better multistakeholder collaborations, different operational structures, changing funding options, etc... ). She noted that while not all organizations will need the same thing (and the project is focused on ‘good practices’ not ‘best practices’) it is looking to change paradigms in the way that we act and operate. She also noted that the project knows it is just a piece of a larger picture and is looking to build bridges to others; (2) Is designed to be a **multi-year testing of ideas**, with a lead organization (such as CIVICUS for the youth issue), for each issue area (some other possible topics noted above). A global Steering Group will look at synergies among the working groups; and (3) Is **aiming to model an inclusive process** – interactive conversations, sharing resources in google.docs, writing blogs and sharing progress in other ways of the learning from the working groups.

Bonnie also shared that this workshop is a first for the CS&TC project, but not a stand-alone. The youth oriented work will be integrated into the broader (and multi-year) CSO operational challenges focus of the CS&TC project. She described the focus of the project as CSO organizations, working within an ‘ecosystem’ that includes many different issues and potential partners (philanthropic, business, social entrepreneurs, educational institutions, etc...) See chart on last page.

Specifically on the topic of youth engagement she described the need for two way conversations (between youth founded and led initiatives and existing organizations) not just a one way conversation that assumes youth only need to be trained, but their perspectives integrated into the

organization's overall project development and operations. The focus is on changing the traditional paradigm by moving from **engagement to integration**.

Cecily Rawlinson spoke on behalf of CIVICUS, the co-sponsor of the workshop. She noted CIVICUS' involvement in developing the CS&TC project and its importance in demonstrating how organizations that talk about change, do it themselves and 'walk the talk'. It is hard but necessary, and CIVICUS wants to lead by example. CIVICUS is also exploring iterative learning in other projects such as the Civil Society Innovation Initiative.

Each of the participants (listed below) then introduced themselves and their interest in the workshop.

### What We Have Learned

The first part of the roundtable discussion was a sharing of what we have learned thus far. A few participants briefly described youth engagement initiatives they have undertaken and some of the lessons learned:

- (1) Cecily described the work CIVICUS has done over the past years with integrating youth, starting with Youth Assemblies taking place before the organization's World Assembly to help build a youth network and integrate their perspectives into the overall conversations. It has been a challenge to maintain the institutional support to sustain this work and the effort put into it has cycled. A Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was created, operating virtually, and had limited impact. However, the YAG's work enabled youth voices to be elected to the CIVICUS Board of Directors in both 2013 and 2016. New momentum has led to the creation of a Youth Action Team which has been tasked with developing recommendations to be integrated into the organization's forthcoming round of strategic planning. Some lessons learned: i) There needs to be a significant organizational commitment and understanding that these efforts may lead to fundamental change to the organization, for such change to happen; ii) Youth representatives on the general decision-making bodies (e.g. Board of Directors) need appropriate support and mentoring.
- (2) Ana Roselli shared some of the experiences that NEXUS has had evolving from a summit to a network (originally of millennials 18-30 when the first summit was held in 2011). As their original network members have gotten older and want to stay involved, it has been a challenge to decide what ages demarcate 'youth', and multi-generational conversations are now being explored.

Ana's comments led to a discussion of what parameters/cut-offs are relevant vis a vis defining 'youth' for an organization's attention. Katherine Scott noted that her foundation starts as young as age 8 in order to involve youth in potentially helpful networks (peer and multi-generational) while their perspectives are still evolving. It was

generally agreed during the discussion that although some age parameters are certainly needed, that (i) Age cut-offs may not be as relevant as other factors if we are aiming to break down silos and focus on what we are trying to accomplish and who can help; and that (ii) a broader age range may lead to involving a larger range of perspectives.

- (3) Erin Mazursky shared some of the research that Rhize has surfaced around how to better engage and support youth efforts. She noted that these included concern among youth activists that although they appreciated some types of support they were wary of their agenda being co-opted. Zack Turk described some of what OSF is learning around helping youth led organizations in Central Asia. From both of their comments a challenge was raised about the disconnect in terminology around ‘youth’ and ‘youth led’.

Erin and Zack’s comments led to a discussion around the importance of choosing terminology that is accessible and exciting to youth and defining terms together with your group so that you can agree to common goals.

It was suggested that the climate change movement may be a good example of a model to move towards including cross-cutting issues (climate change, climate justice, economic justice, inequality, etc...)

- (4) Anusha Yadav described Accountability Lab’s work with incubators that help youth influencers to have the multi-year support they need to get their initiatives going.
- (5) Lauren Bradford talked about experiences her partnership programs have had in working with diverse groups including multi-generational ones. One of the learnings she shared was the need for facilitators to keep these discussions and processes on track.

This led to a conversation about how changing the way we act; that structural paradigms are a practice; and that it is easy for all of us to fall back into old patterns without the structures, support groups and in some cases key facilitators to keep us on track.

### Moving Forward

The next part of the conversation focused on from what we have learned thus far, and how individual organizations, and groups working together, can bring about change. We created these lists (*with examples where we identified them noted in italics*).

#### *For both*

- Facilitated conversations to keep the discussions in the realm of paradigm changing (as noted above) (*Foundation Center*)
- Demonstrating the value of sharing and networks to add value to your own goals.
- Relationship building
- Co-created agendas (*Student movement in Chile*)

### *For individual organizations*

- Demonstrate the added value of youth perspectives to your organization's work and goals.
- Understanding the importance of a multi-year commitments for bringing about significant change (*CIVICUS*)
- Be practical – try some pilot projects (*NEXUS' multi-generational conversations at upcoming summit*)
- Sharing practical examples of good practices/new models being used
- Incubators (*Accountability Lab*)
- Reviewing the 'full picture'/'ecosystem' and being clear about "what's our part/niche"?
- Engage with partners who think/act differently to push your own thinking.

### *For working together to change the ecosystem we work in*

- Identify 'boundary spanners'/'cultural interpreters, those individuals who can bring representatives of different sectors/issues/silos together.
- Think in terms of multi-year commitments.
- Look at ways to move public conversations around change forward – how do we get more people involved in the conversations to create more allies?
- Work to ensure that we share our efforts and across silos as much as possible.
- Look for ways to encourage collaborative and multi-year funding (*Rhize pilot projects*)

### Concluding thoughts from participants

- There is good learning to share around coalition-building of the 'excited' and what can work. We need to make greater efforts to share our own learning and tap into existing resources around lessons learned. Participants also noted the value in engaging with those from outside their traditional network and breaking the "silos" of civil society.
- For collaboration across networks to work we need shared definitions of impact and theories of change. We should argue about approaches, not end goals.
- Our conversations about youth engagement/integration inevitably took us to a discussion of a broader range of issues. If we improve the existing CSO 'ecosystem' we will help strengthen the possibilities that youth will want to be engaged with it.
- Acknowledge that the larger sector is not working for youth and needs changes. Need to also challenge ourselves and our own organizations to go outside our comfort zones.
- We (as a sector) have now done a lot of talking, it's time to test some new approaches.
- We need to shift the dialogue away from being locked into age parameters to integrating youth perspectives.

- The workshop highlighted the importance of reflective conversations which we don't take enough time to do.

Participants (in alphabetical order)

Suhani Bhushan, CIVICUS, DataShift

Lauren Bradford, Foundation Center, Global Partnerships

Anabel Cruz, Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo, Global Consultant, CS&TC project Steering Group, CIVICUS Board member

Bonnie Koenig, CS&TC project manager and Global Consultant

Erin Mazursky, Rhize, Executive Director

Cecily Rawlinson, CIVICUS, CSII project and youth programs liaison

Ana Roselli, Nexus Youth Summit, Partnerships Coordinator

Katherine Scott, Frieda Fox Family Foundation, Director of Youth Philanthropy

Zachery (Zack) Turk, Open Society Foundations, Strategy Unit – Youth Exchange

Anusha Yadav, Accountability Lab

Bonnie Koenig  
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