

## **Personal Reflections on the Birth of YEP's Endowment**

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*The summer after YEP's inaugural grant cycle, several of the veteran youth (those who had a year's experience in the group) had the opportunity to go together to a conference in Michigan where they were able to network and learn with many other youth philanthropy groups. While all of these groups share similar missions, the paths towards empowering youth in this unique way looks different in each YEP (or YAC -Youth Advisory Council)) group. Our central Illinois group chose to split up during the days. They would attend sessions with youth from other groups. They would eat lunch with others and make new friends each day. By forming these relationships, they were learning a lot about both the similarities and differences between our organizations. Each evening for dinner, the youth from our YEP and the present mentors would eat together. We would debrief each day and talk about what we learned and what that could mean for our own YEP group.*

*Towards the end of the school year, the members had started to ask questions like, "What happens if our generous donor stops donating?" As mentors, we worked hard to make sure YEP was youth-guided. We thought it was important for all major decisions (such as how to fund YEP and ensure our sustainability) to come from the youth. When debating which grant proposals to fund, the youth often discussed whether the programs of the local organizations could be sustainable in future years without YEP funding. It was very exciting to see the youth use this same lens to evaluate their own program. The discussion about the longevity of YEP took a bit of a backseat when we received news that YEP would continue to be funded in the immediate future by this same generous donor. Attention then turned to recruiting for a second fun-filled year of doing good!*

*During one of these debriefs at the Michigan conference, this discussion returned, but this time, the youth had a solution in mind. Some of these other groups had endowment funds which supported their programs. The YEP members decided to bring this idea back to their new cohort that summer, and the idea took off from there. In true YEP fashion, youth developed the idea of starting an endowment, the youth debated pros/ cons/ other options, and then the youth reached a consensus. Once they had this goal in mind, they pushed full steam ahead into developing a committee who created concrete goals and milestones. All YEP members donated (even very small amounts) to show their support for the cause. They invited speakers who had experience with fundraising. They practiced "asks" and used their social network to organize meetings throughout the community. Not even a year later, they had raised enough money [over \$20,000] to open their own endowment fund and ensure the sustainability of an IPCF Youth Engaged in Philanthropy initiative.*