

REFRAMING POWER

AN EVALUATION OF THE YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL'S FIRST THREE YEARS

By Kristen Zimmerman, Young Wisdom Project

MOVEMENT LED BY PEOPLE OF COLOR SEEKS MEDIA JUSTICE—NOT JUST MEDIA

Speaking for Ourselves

MARILYN THAMMA RAYON and RON RUBIN

In the busy years of 1981 and 1982, the National Council of Churches and the NAACP in Jackson, Mississippi, led a coalition of leaders of the television news. They drew a contract line from the media they faced on the news of the nation they broadcast in the program which they turned on the TV. In this media, television news was the national television in Jackson. After the national television news was widely selling to several African American stations, the national television news was the national television news. And the national television news was the national television news.



In the busy years of 1981 and 1982, the national television news was the national television news. The national television news was the national television news. The national television news was the national television news.

SUNDAY Oakland Tribune



...of the television news...
...of the television news...
...of the television news...

Instead of...
Therashamundo...
Town and county...

GUARDIAN How Clear Channel wrecked KMEL



A case study in the perils of monopoly media. And it's just the beginning.

El Tecolote

...of the television news...
...of the television news...
...of the television news...



反對收緊移民法 大批遣返 “嚴重罪行” 屋崙亞太裔青少年上街

...of the television news...
...of the television news...
...of the television news...



...of the television news...
...of the television news...
...of the television news...

Teens Gain in Fight

Alameda County: Using nonviolent tactics of the civil rights movement, minority youths win reductions in the size, funding of juvenile hall.



...of the television news...
...of the television news...
...of the television news...

No holds barred



Oakland youths protest county 'superjail' plan

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WE NOT ONLY WANT TO CHANGE POLICY, WE WANT TO CHANGE THE WAY PEOPLE THINK. THE MEDIA IS A PRIMARY TOOL TO REACH A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE AND HAVE A FORUM NOT JUST ON THE BATTLEFIELD OF POLICY, BUT OF IDEAS.

—YMC MEMBER, PUEBLO'S YOUTH OF OAKLAND UNITED



INTRODUCTION

On March 7, 2000—Election Day in California—a storm was brewing in San Francisco. On the state ballot was Proposition 21, the so-called Juvenile Crime Initiative, which allowed prosecutors to try children as adults, put 14 year olds in adult prisons and seek the death penalty for juveniles if the crime was gang-related. Youth organizers had been leading a spirited campaign against the corporate backers of Proposition 21, including PG&E, Hilton Hotel and Chevron Corp. When it became clear that Proposition 21 was going to pass in the state election, more than 400 youth and young adults converged on San Francisco's Downtown Hilton Hotel to show their outrage.¹ With raised fists the group occupied the upscale hotel's lobby and began chanting in unison:

*Ain't no power like the power of the youth
'cause the power of the youth don't stop.*

The following day national and local headlines captured the rage, and to some degree the message, of the crowd. In the last six weeks of the campaign, youth organizers in the Bay Area and Los Angeles had begun to strengthen their media strategy and turn the tide of the public debate. Even so, they faced tremendous challenges that proved to be insurmountable. Messages criminalizing young people and advocating punishment as a solution had already shaped the way the public was thinking about young people, crime and the initiative. Or in the words of one journalist, the press had already “spent a decade selling the notion that Armageddon, teen style” was just around the corner.² And pro-Prop 21 forces, led by ex-California governor Pete Wilson, had maintained a sophisticated and well-financed media arm that dominated news coverage throughout the election season. As a result, most voters believed that juvenile crime was on the rise and that Proposition 21 would target only the most violent juvenile offenders, despite the fact that both of these points were false. While the No on Prop 21 organizers realized the importance of media strategy, they lacked the skills and infrastructure to carry out the high-level media campaign needed to combat media stereotypes and advance alternatives to policing and punishment. In the end, the proposition passed and a post-election analysis showed organizers had in fact lost on “the battlefield of ideas”—that is, in the media.³

Even though organizers lost this fight, it was clear that opposition to Prop 21 had helped to solidify a powerful multiracial youth movement. Youth organizers made what could have been an uncontroversial tough-on-crime initiative highly contested in major regions of the state. In regions where youth organizing was the strongest, Proposition 21 was actually defeated in the polls⁴ and later challenged in the state Supreme Court. Ultimately, the campaign captured the imagination of the youth organizing community. A movement was growing, but still needed to find a way to amplify its voice. Organizers imagined that with the right strategy, infrastructure and messages they could move the public debate and change the social policies that had been focused on incarcerating, instead of educating or providing opportunities, to their communities. It was this potential that inspired the birth of the Youth Media Council.

THE POLITICAL ROOTS OF THE YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL

[IN THE 1980S AND 1990S] WHEN THE “WAR ON CRIME” BEGAN, NEWS ACCOUNTS OF “BLACK-ON-BLACK” CRIME SEEMED TO ESCALATE TO AN ALL-TIME HIGH, AND TERMS LIKE “SUPERPREDATOR” WERE COUPLED WITH EUGENICS THEORIES OF THE INHERENT CRIMINALITY OF TEENAGERS. IT WAS IN THE MIDST OF THIS RHETORIC OF WAR THAT I CAME OF AGE IN NEW YORK CITY, BOMBARDED BY A PUBLIC DEBATE WITH THE INHUMANITY OF YOUTH OF COLOR AT ITS CORE.

— MALKIA CYRIL, YMC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FROM “BEYOND SYMBOLS, SCARECROWS AND SCAPEGOATS: ENGAGING BROADCASTERS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE”

One challenge of the Proposition 21 campaign was that young people of color needed to sway the opinions of white, middle-class voters who generally betrayed youth interests at the ballot box.⁵ It was clear that mass media was an essential vehicle to communicate the movement’s message to the general public. However, this also created a major contradiction: as young organizers worked to defeat the initiative, they were forced to rely on the same media that consistently misrepresented and stereotyped them.

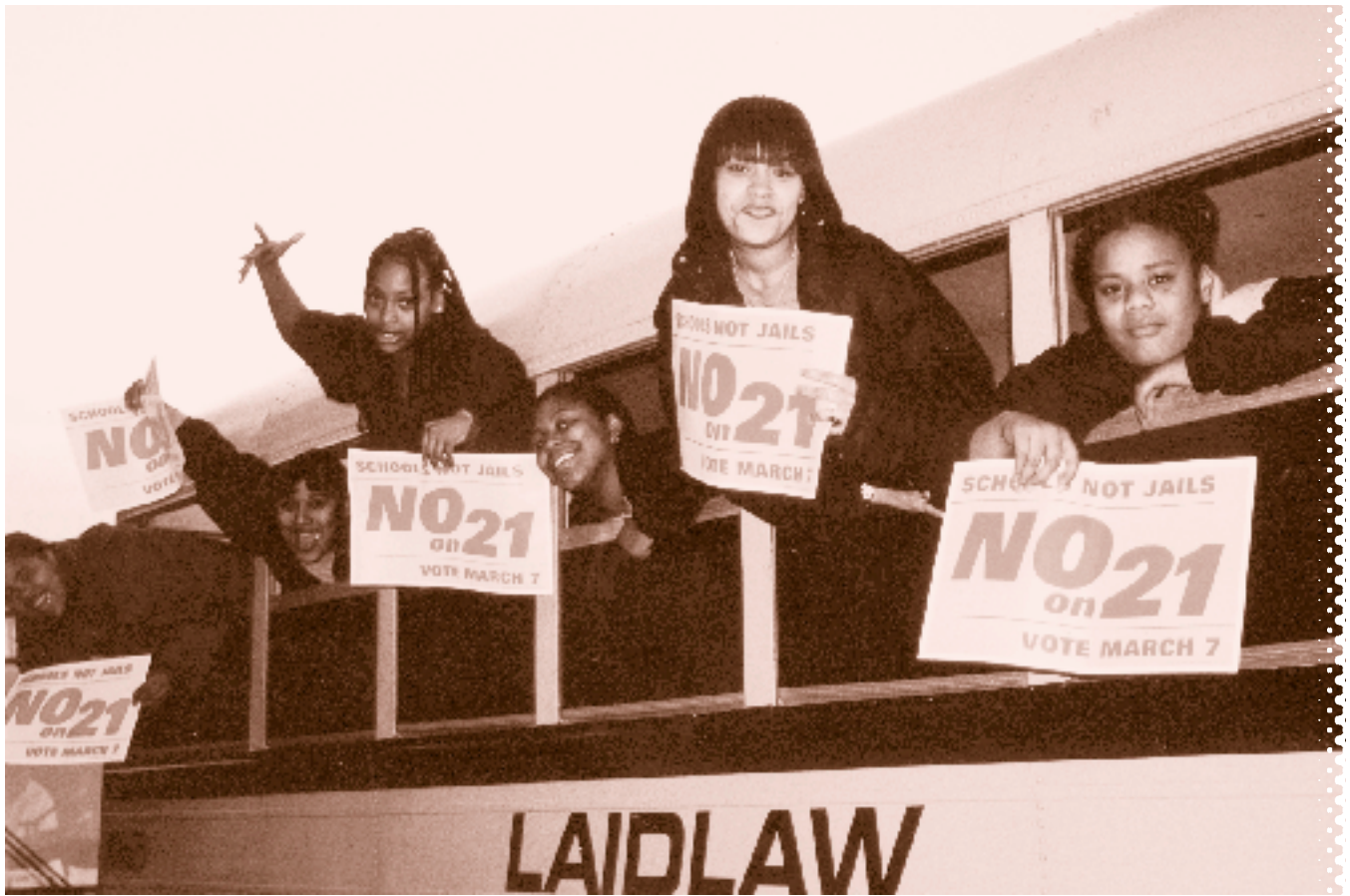
The public dialogue on Proposition 21 represented the culmination of years of racist anti-youth images in the media and policy initiatives around the nation—and in particular California—that scapegoated youth and promoted punitive social policies. Starting with the “war on crime” in the 1980s and “war on drugs” in the 1990s, young people of color were increasingly framed as criminals in the mass media. Media images of teenage “superpredators” led the public to believe that juvenile crime was on the rise, despite the fact that youth crime was at an all-time low and violent crime had been steadily declining for over a decade.⁶ This helped to set the national political agenda by manufacturing fear among the public and creating a mandate that policymakers take a tough-on-crime stance. Media also played an important role in “priming” the public for policy initiatives that criminalized and punished youth, such as Propositions 21 and 184 (three-strikes), as well as others that eroded important social safety-net programs for youth of color and their families (California Propositions 209, 227 and 187).⁷

Three-quarters of the public claim to make important policy decisions based on what they read, watch and listen to in the media.⁸ The proportion of public concern about issues such as crime, terrorism and school violence is directly shaped by the attention paid to those issues by the media.⁹ While children comprise a full quarter of the U.S. population, they account for only 10 percent of news stories.¹⁰ When they do appear, studies have repeatedly shown that media coverage of youth primarily places them in the context of crime and violence, where young people of color are portrayed as perpetrators out of proportion to their actual arrest rates and sometimes in direct contradiction to crime trends.^{11, 12}

The impact of media bias is more than symbolic. As the term “youth” became more and more closely associated with crime and violence in the news media, young people of color became scapegoats to justify economic policies that dismantled social safety nets and were used as scarecrows in crime coverage to justify harsher penalties and larger prisons. In essence, media messages about youth became a way to justify and legislate racist policies that criminalize youth of color while using “colorblind” language. In this context, media bias has real and dangerous policy implications for both youth and communities of color.¹³

The attack on youth has its roots in the social and political strategy of the New Right Wing. In the 1970s, a few ultra-conservative leaders planted the seeds for what would become a well-coordinated effort to take back the country from the “satanic liberalism” of the 1960s and the new deal of the 1930s. Between 1970 and 2000, the conservative movement developed a sophisticated machine that dominated all areas of the country’s communication infrastructure—from content to policy.¹⁴ Through the development of conservative foundations and right-wing think tanks, the proliferation of academic writing, acquisition and consolidation of media outlets, and investment in conservative leadership, the Right managed to control the public debate and shift the ideological stance of the country.

With the deregulation and consolidation of media in the 1980s and 1990s, mechanisms for holding media accountable to local communities had all but disappeared. Standards like the Fairness Doctrine, which organizers of color had used in the past to force media accountability, were rolled back. Media consolidation, ushered in by the 1996 Telecommunications Act, further exaggerated the impacts of deregulation by putting ownership of most media in the hands of just six corporations. It is well documented that the corporate interests of media conglomerates skew content by prioritizing sensational stories over fairness, accuracy and public need.¹⁵ Led by a conservative agenda and influenced by corporate interests, the last decade has been marked by glaring structural inequalities in our



media system that represent a crisis of democracy and disproportionately impact youth and communities of color.¹⁶

It was in this context that a vibrant and visionary youth movement emerged in the San Francisco Bay Area. Young leaders were on the forefront of tackling issues from police misconduct and criminalization, education, immigrant rights and economic conditions. As the movement crystallized, it became clear that young organizers of color needed to develop the capacity to effectively participate in the media landscape and hold outlets accountable for biased coverage. Media—not just policymakers—was playing a major role in shaping the policies that youth organizers were tackling. However, it was also clear that engaging strategically with media was not one of the movement’s strengths.

BIRTH OF THE YMC: Bringing media strategy to the youth organizing movement

When the YMC was launched in 2001, none of the San Francisco Bay Area’s youth organizing groups regularly engaged in media advocacy nor did they have a strategy to do so. This weakness was not just a problem in the Bay Area youth movement. The Applied Research Center’s 2003 study *Youth Rising* documented that media strategy was by far the weakest element of the national youth organizing sector.¹⁷ In order to help the youth movement meet its organizing and policy change goals, a few movement leaders identified the need for internal capacity, coordination amongst groups, and a strategy to change media and shape the public debate.

The Youth Media Council was launched to address this need. The YMC grew out of work that We Interrupt This Message (“Interrupt”) had begun with racial and economic justice groups in 1996. Interrupt had pioneered methods for media capacity building, strategic communications, and media watchdog and content analysis projects for racial and eco-

KEY DEFINITIONS

Media Justice

Media justice is a framework for understanding and responding to the role media structure, ownership and policy play in maintaining inequality within a racist, free-market society.

Media Bias

Unbalanced content that contains stereotypes or fails to tell a full story.

Media Advocacy

The strategic process of using media to pressure decisionmakers to make policy changes.

Media Accountability

Strategic action in response to biased or inaccurate media to increase the accountability of media decisionmakers to their audiences.

Strategic Communications

The strategic process of using media and communications to influence public opinion, corporate behavior and public policy.

Youth-led Organization/Program

An organization or program in which youth are in all major leadership roles and have majority membership on boards of directors, with appropriate support from adult allies. Youth-led does not necessarily mean no adult involvement; adults may play important ally roles. Youth-driven refers to an organization or program in which youth have substantive, meaningful roles in leadership positions, including governance and programming.

Youth Organizer

Young people who are organizers. *Note:* This term is sometimes used to refer to adults or young adults who are organizing young people, as opposed to youth who are conducting organizing amongst their peers. We choose to use the second meaning, because it treats youth as the subjects, and not the objects, in organizing.

Youth Organizing

Organizing that is led and conducted by young people; organizing where young people are the community or base that is being organized.

conomic justice organizations. By forming the YMC, Interrupt hoped to build on the lessons of this work and apply it to the emerging multiracial youth movement.

Originally, the YMC was envisioned as a two-year pilot project with eight member organizations. By creating a Council of organizations, the YMC created a structure where member organizations would not only receive services, but participate in decision making, planning and special projects. Staff hoped to have member organizations take over the leadership of the Council after the two-year period. This plan shifted after year one, when the YMC realized that the youth movement needed a central organization to develop and sustain media capacity over time.

THE MODEL FOR THE YMC'S FIRST THREE YEARS

Media justice is not new; it is the logical outgrowth of the larger movement for justice. It is the microphone that helps us touch others when we are advocates, the mirror that reflects our dreams and fears when we are consumers, and the vehicle through which we actualize our stories when we are producers.

—Makani Themba-Nixon, "Pleading Our Own Cause," *Colorlines*, Winter 2003

In their first three years, the YMC existed as a unique Bay Area-based youth organizing, leadership development, media capacity building and watchdog organization dedicated to developing youth-driven strategies for media justice. Their mission was based on the fundamental belief that communication is a human right. From the newsrooms to the radio waves they envisioned a world in which all communities had the power and means to debate public policy, create alternative media and information sources, and shape culture on their own terms.

To this end, the YMC program model was designed with three interlocking components: media capacity building, strategic coordination and organizing for media accountability.

Media capacity building: The goal of the YMC's media capacity-building work was to build the understanding and skill of the youth movement to access and use media as a tool for social justice organizing. This work happened at three levels: with individual organizers, with organizations, and in the sector as a whole. The YMC experimented with a variety of capacity-building strategies in the first three years including group trainings, tailored support for individual organizations, intensive coaching for organizations engaged in active campaigns and ongoing public relations technical assistance (PRTA).

Strategic coordination: Early on, the YMC recognized that individual youth groups would only be so successful if they tried to influence media on their own. The goal of the YMC's strategic coordination work was to amplify the power of youth organizers to impact the media by working together in a clear, consistent way. Strategic coordination included joint media campaigns for coalition-based organizing efforts, coordination of movement communications through centralized strategy sessions, message development and tools, and building relationships between the youth organizing sector and media outlets.

Organizing for media accountability: The YMC also recognized that even if youth organizers were able to access media, the problem of media bias would be ongoing unless media outlets were accountable to marginalized communities and adopted policies that reflected media justice principles. The goal of YMC's organizing work was to promote media accountability and policy change. So far, this component has included publishing media content studies, and YMC-led organizing campaigns to hold media outlets accountable for their coverage and policies.

By the end of their third year, the YMC grew from a short-term pilot project to a unique and successful organization. From the start, the project unfolded as an innovative and ambitious experiment. Through trial and error the staff developed models for all three areas of the

work. And at the end of this period they realized the need to reflect on their experiences in order to strengthen their work and share their model with others.

THE SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

The Young Wisdom Project is a capacity-building project of the Movement Strategy Center that documents and strengthens young people's leadership in and governance of social justice organizations. Young Wisdom believes that young people, as constituents, are a critical part of movements for social change. Young Wisdom is dedicated to documenting projects and stories from the youth movement with the purpose of strengthening our overall capacity for social and cultural change.

In 2003, the YMC approached the Young Wisdom Project to design and lead the evaluation of their start-up period. The YMC was interested in working with the Young Wisdom Project because of its knowledge of the youth organizing movement and progressive media field, and its experience with participatory action research and evaluation. In keeping with the philosophy of the Youth Media Council, the Young Wisdom Project conducted a semi-participatory evaluation of the YMC, focusing primarily on their capacity-building work with members.

The goals of this project were to evaluate the best practices and lessons learned from the YMC's first three years and to share the story of the YMC's development. In addition to providing Young Wisdom's "outsider" lens to the project, the evaluation also used "insider" knowledge by engaging staff and members of the YMC in self-reflection and analysis as a way to inform and strengthen practice. To this end we asked the following questions:

- What lessons did the YMC learn through their process of institution building? What were the challenges, milestones and best practices?
- What were the challenges, lessons learned and best practices from the YMC's program work and their efforts to:
 - build the media capacity of the Bay Area youth movement
 - facilitate strategic coordination among their members, and
 - organize for media accountability?
- What was the impact of the YMC's institution building and media capacity-building work on Bay Area youth organizing?

To explore these questions the Young Wisdom Project:

- Conducted 10 interviews with YMC members from the first three years to distill lessons from their experiences,
- Interviewed the three core YMC staff members who were at the YMC the first three years,
- Held a focus group with staff to reconstruct the story of the YMC's development, the key milestones in the timeline and lessons learned from each phase, and
- Reviewed key documents including grant proposals and reports, member group assessments, YMC publications, the YMC website, press about the YMC and their members, and observed the YMC youth-journalist roundtables and member groups' media events.

The YMC history timeline and the findings outlined in the next two sections reveal the story of this small but powerful organization and their deep impact on the Bay Area youth movement. In summary, the Young Wisdom Project found that the YMC successfully helped to put media strategy on the map of the Bay Area youth movement by demonstrating the power of linking strategic communications to youth organizing. Through their intensive capacity-building work the YMC developed new youth leaders with media expertise, strengthened youth organizing campaigns and built media capacity in marginalized communities.

The YMC was also able to provide much-needed media infrastructure to the youth movement. By operating as a centralized hub for strategic communications and media account-



YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS 2001-2003

Asian Immigrant Women
Advocates (AIWA)*

Asian Pacific Islanders for
Reproductive Health (APIRH)

Asian and Pacific Islander
Youth Promoting Advocacy and
Leadership (AYPAL)*

C-Beyond

Center for Young Women's
Development (CYWD)*

Let's Get Free (LGF)*

PUEBLO's Youth of Oakland
United (YOU)*

Young Workers United (YWU)*

Youth Force Coalition*

Youth Making A Change (Y-MAC)*

* Indicates member groups
interviewed for this evaluation

ability work, the YMC was able to broker relationships between youth and journalists and shift young people's relationship and access to media. Their dedication to strategic media coordination led the YMC to take the hard road of building a participatory organizational structure. While hard work, this allowed the YMC to build a strong network among their members and deep analysis of the role of media in youth organizing. And, while most of the YMC's success lied with building youth organizing groups' media capacity, the YMC also had some significant outcomes and lessons from their media accountability organizing. The lessons from their organizing work will help them as they continue to develop and explore this area of work.

As youth organizers around the country work to influence not only the policies of our country but also the culture that influences the way we think and operate, media is a critical arena to engage. The YMC's work offers an important model for youth organizers to communicate—and achieve—media justice.

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YMC HISTORY : A GRAPHIC TIMELINE

POLITICAL CLIMATE

1980s Reagan dismantles the Fairness Doctrine, rolling back standards for fairness, accuracy and balance in broadcasting

1996 Telecommunications Act passed, further deregulating media

Racial Justice Movement reeling from wave of CA propositions that attacked communities of color, youth and immigrants: Props 184, 187, 209, 227

Youth Force Coalition's "UPSET the SETUP" brought together youth organizers to strategize around juvenile justice issues

POLITICAL CLIMATE

We Interrupt This Message turns 5 years old

September 11, 2001 dramatically shifts the political and economic climate; progressive media strategy becomes even more critical

Department of Homeland Security created; Patriot Act passed

BEFORE YMC 1996-2001

We Interrupt This Message, YMC's parent, founded to challenge stereotypes in news and build media capacity of social justice sector

YMC INCEPTION 2000

We Interrupt This Message develops model for YMC pilot project, produces *Soundbites and Cellblocks, a study of media coverage of Prop 21*, and hires YMC Director Malkia Cyril

YMC LAUNCH 2001

Youth Media Council launched to challenge criminalizing stereotypes in news and build media capacity of youth movement

ASSETS

Strong network of allies in racial justice movement

Founders of a racial justice framework for strategic communications

Supported growth of an emerging youth movement

ANALYSIS

Racial justice and people of color-led organizations need new, non-traditional public relations strategies that take into account the impact of media bias and racism on public debate and policy

STRATEGIES

Fight wedge attacks through innovative strategic communications

Confront media criminalization and increase media accountability

METHODS

Build media capacity in racial and economic justice organizations

Conduct strategic communications to change the terms of debate

Act as watchdog of media and conduct content analyses

ASSETS

Strong network of allies in racial justice and youth movements

Develops framework linking racial justice and youth organizing

Momentum of youth movement, hip-hop activism

ANALYSIS

Racial justice youth organizing groups need public relations and media accountability strategies that take into account the impact of media bias and racism on public policy and debate

STRATEGIES

Influence public debate by amplifying progressive youth voice in the media

Coordinate the youth movement's media messages and strategy

Confront media criminalization and increase media accountability

METHODS

Build media capacity for racial justice youth organizing groups

Provide strategic communications for youth organizing groups

Act as watchdog of media and conduct content analyses

POLITICAL CLIMATE

June 2002: Interrupt closes its doors; YMC staff play key roles in Interrupt's transition and closure

U.S. launches wars against Afghanistan and then Iraq

Increased right-wing control over media content and policy (e.g imbedded reporters, interlocking interests of media corporations and defense contractors)

POLITICAL CLIMATE

FCC increases interest in "localism" at the same time standards for local news coverage decline

YMC becomes fiscally sponsored by the Movement Strategy Center

Based on community need, YMC decides to continue beyond the 2-year pilot phase

POLITICAL CLIMATE

Meeting at Highlander Center: Media Justice concept begins to develop, linking media reform to broader social justice agenda

YMC YEAR ONE
2001-2002

Increase strategic media coordination amongst 8 member groups

Develop skills of youth as media activists and leaders

Challenge media bias

In spite of Interrupt's closure YMC:

- Built a regional council of 8 youth organizations
- Provided media skills training to 10 youth organizations
- Developed 15 new youth leaders
- Published *Speaking for Ourselves* content analysis

The YMC needs increased buy-in from youth sector in order to maintain a Council structure

Media capacity building works best in the context of an active campaign

Confronting biased media is a relevant entry point for developing new youth leaders

Content analysis helped build credibility for marginalized communities to influence media

YMC YEAR TWO
2002-2003

Continue developing skills of youth media activists

Increase strategic media coordination amongst coalitions

Challenge media bias

Transition YMC from pilot project to organization

- Grew staff capacity from 2 to 3.5
- Provided skill-building training to 10 organizations
- Conducted full media capacity-building projects for 2 coalitions and 3 organizations
- Created online tools and organized first youth-journalist roundtable
- Published content study of 106.1 KMEL
- Established Community Coalition for Media Accountability

Coordination between groups increases capacity and impact

Movement capacity building needs to start with organizational capacity building

Youth sector needs relationships with journalists and centralized tools to increase influence

YMC must build organizational capacity to conduct direct organizing

YMC YEAR THREE
2003-2004

Increase media capacity of youth organizations and coalitions

Challenge media bias and increase infrastructure for media accountability

Document analysis, models and methods

Conducted one intensive media capacity-building project

- Organized second youth-journalist roundtable
- Partnered with national media outlets to place youth stories
- Conducted 34 workshops and provided TA to 23 groups
- Organized base-building events and hired part-time media accountability organizer
- Published *Bay Area Media Map* landscaping regional media

Youth sector needs an intermediary to influence public debate in an ongoing way

Work is needed to effect structural change in media policy realm

Movement capacity is best built through infrastructure development, centralized tools and technical assistance to active campaigns

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

LESSONS

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

LESSONS

“...The YMC helped to shift the Bay Area youth movement culture from one that viewed media work as a lost cause to one that saw media as an essential part of any organizing campaign.”

BEST PRACTICES: FINDINGS FROM STAFF AND MEMBER INTERVIEWS

1 THE YMC DEMONSTRATED THE POWER OF LINKING MEDIA STRATEGY TO YOUTH ORGANIZING

Getting media to shed light on our target, on the whole entire issue of juvenile justice and incarceration, gave young people voice and power over their situation and showed what they can do. —YMC member

As members of the Bay Area youth movement reflected on the lessons of the No on Prop 21 campaign, they realized they needed improved skills and infrastructure to reach the public through media. Prop 21 and other racist, anti-youth ballot issues from the past decade had played out through the media as much or more than any other arena. However, even while youth organizers recognized the general need for media strategy, it would take time and energy for groups to understand and invest in what it would take to do this well.

One of the most significant accomplishments of the YMC was putting media and media strategy on the radar of youth organizers in the Bay Area and beyond. Before the YMC was launched, most youth organizing groups knew media was important, but had no idea how to do media work. At best, youth organizers saw media work as an add-on to organizing; at worst they saw the media industry as an insurmountable problem for their communities. In their first three years, the YMC helped to shift the Bay Area youth movement culture from one that viewed media work as a lost cause to one that saw media as an essential part of any organizing campaign. They created buy-in amongst the youth organizing community by investing time and energy in 1) media capacity building, 2) long-term relationships, and 3) Council building.

CREATED BUY-IN THROUGH MEDIA CAPACITY BUILDING

According to interviews conducted for this report, all of the YMC's members now believe media plays a unique and essential role in organizing and movement building, but this shift in consciousness did not happen immediately. In their first few years the YMC focused on doing media capacity-building projects and training with each of their member organizations. As these groups saw the impact of the media work on their organizing, they began to believe in its power. For example, a youth organizer from Young Workers United described how media directly strengthened their base building:

We as young people are anti-media because what we see in the media doesn't reflect the truth or our reality. But what we found was the more that workers saw our faces, or Cheesecake Factory worker faces, in the news and the more they saw the media latching



YMC 2001

on to the campaign as news, the more they were willing to trust us and take bigger risks at confronting their boss or coming to meetings.

The more organizers engaged with the media as skilled spokespeople and advocates, the more they realized they could use media to meet their larger goals. The four organizations that worked on coalition-based campaigns, and one other who was running their own campaign, all reported the same sense of power and agency as they successfully taped into media. In fact, even the three groups who were not engaged in active campaigns found that media work increased their power. For example, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) realized that media was a way to propel the issues of immigrant communities into the dominant white consciousness and shape public opinion:

The work that YMC is doing to get immigrant youth voices in the media is extremely important in framing the debate and also in empowering the community. It helps to build a bridge and educate the mainstream culture about the issues.

By the end of their third year, the demand for the YMC's support grew and their membership expanded from the original eight groups to 15. Most now see media work as critical for their small youth organizing groups to make an impact. One member noted:

I would say no youth organization has the capacity not to do media work. In order for your organization to stick around and grow, media has to be part of what you are doing.

CREATED BUY-IN THROUGH BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEMBERS

The YMC also created buy-in through building strong relationships with their members and their networks. Collectively, YMC staff had a history of organizing in the racial justice, youth empowerment and queer liberation movements. When they started the YMC they brought these relationships and a movement-building sensibility with them.

This commitment to building long-term relationships and investing in racial justice and youth empowerment movements mattered to the YMC's members. Three organizers specifically said YMC's connections to the youth and racial justice movements were critical for building their trust. More specifically, they said that the YMC's tools, trainings and convenings were

“...The YMC’s tools, trainings and convenings were relevant because they were designed to address the challenges and needs of communities of color and young people engaging in media work.”

relevant because they were designed to address the challenges and needs of communities of color and young people engaging in media work. While the YMC did not frame their work at the time as “movement building,” the commitment they showed to relationship-building ultimately strengthened local youth organizing networks focused on racial justice.

CREATED BUY-IN THROUGH COUNCIL BUILDING

Finally, the YMC created buy-in through building the Council structure. The original goal of the Council was to build a network of youth organizations that would coordinate their campaigns, messages and media strategy. This involved building trust, developing basic capacity and strengthening relationships with individual members in order to lay the foundation for higher-level work. As groups shared stories about their media work and successes, they strengthened their relationship to the YMC, the work and each other.

The YMC experimented with the best model to support the participation of members. Originally, Council meetings were every month and they attempted to address every area of media work—media capacity building, political education, media planning, as well as organizing against media bias. At least six YMC member organizations felt there was a need to clarify and narrow the purpose of the Council:

Honestly, I feel like they tried a bunch of things and nothing was super solidified or consistent. But it makes sense there would be a need to experiment. As far as I know, it’s a pretty new type of organization; there aren’t a lot of models out there. But now they just need to communicate more clearly what joining means.

When YMC staff realized this approach was not sustainable, they experimented with separating the political education and planning into two annual Council retreats.

Six of the eight YMC members said they have appreciated this new structure and the opportunity to influence the YMC’s direction as an organization. Representatives of six groups said the retreats helped to strengthen their relationships with YMC staff and other organizations in the youth movement. Four specifically said these retreats have played an important role in aligning their thinking:

I think the retreats have been a highlight. The big picture thinking that happened was really key. At the last one we did some work around the history of the Right’s control of the media. It was deep and really informed people’s consciousness.

Despite the challenges, the YMC’s investment in participatory planning has paid off. In just three years, their membership has grown from eight groups to 15 with tiers of participation. The process has strengthened the cohesion of the Council through relationship building and joint analysis. It has also clearly created buy-in and ownership among their members and confidence among staff that they are on the right path. By taking the hard road, YMC has created a movement-building organization, rather than just another intermediary.

EXPERIMENTING WITH THE COUNCIL STRUCTURE

Year 1

Monthly Council sessions to conduct skills building, political education, media planning, media strategy and participate in YMC media accountability projects

Year 2

Monthly skills building through the Global Justice Media School
Media discussion series
1 annual Council retreat
Formation of a media accountability working group

Year 3

Campaign-based skills building
1 annual political education training for trainers
1 annual strategy retreat
Continued media accountability group

2 THE YMC DEVELOPED NEW YOUTH LEADERS WITH MEDIA EXPERTISE

The YMC has played an important role in the Bay Area youth movement by helping to identify and develop a core of new, young leaders with expertise in strategic communications and media accountability tactics. Through their capacity building and organizing projects, the YMC politicized and mentored youth who grew up locally and had not gone to college. By integrating skill-building training into all YMC projects, these young leaders developed expertise that was missing from the wider movement. Most importantly, this helped to expand the movement leadership from mostly college-educated young adults who had grown up outside of the region. Many of the youth and young adults who started their political work as YMC members and staff went on to play leadership roles in other key organizations. In practice, the YMC's Campaign Research Team project and their capacity-building projects with coalition-based campaigns were especially successful in this regard.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE YMC'S CAMPAIGN RESEARCH TEAM PROJECT

The YMC established the Campaign Research Team (CRT) as their central project in year one. The staff worked intensively with 15 previously unorganized youth of color from Oakland to conduct a media accountability and organizing project. After receiving training in media accountability and advocacy skills, the team conducted an analysis of KTVU Channel 2's reporting on youth and crime, published a study and organized follow-up activities to hold KTVU accountable. For most of the team, it was their first experience with an organizing group and the first time they participated in political education and training. One of the CRT participants explained why media work was an effective way to politicize high school youth:

Media was something that everyone had experience with and it was a starting point [for] conversation. Everyone watches the news or sees newspapers. It's just part of people's personal experience.

Beyond developing the individual participants of the team, the CRT helped to build movement leadership. The project was designed as a way to develop membership for a key YMC partner, Let's Get Free (LGF), an organization working on juvenile justice issues. Four of the CRT members transferred to LGF at the conclusion of the project and three remained active for several years. The project was successful in building the membership, leadership and capacity of LGF, which produced long-term results. As the participants got older and gained more experience through LGF, they slowly moved on to play leadership roles in other key organizations, and continued to be active with the YMC.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE YMC'S MEDIA CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECTS

After year one, the YMC continued to play a critical role in the leadership development of new organizers through their media capacity-building projects. The YMC's work on the No on FF campaign, Stop the Superjail campaign, and the One Love, One Nation, Stop Deportation campaign, helped to create a base of 16 young leaders based in several different organizations who understood the role of media in organizing, and had the potential to teach others. As with the CRT, these projects engaged youth with little organizing or media experience. An organizer from PUEBLO explained:

For a lot of our folks, it was the first time they had media and communications training. And for the most part, the people who got the training essentially became experts. So we had 15- and 16-year-old people, debating the mayor and the police chief.

Because of their investment in these intensive projects, the Youth Media Council now has a trained core of 20 youth and young adult media activists. By creating a community of activists who understand media strategy and advocacy, the YMC has built media capacity within the youth movement and created the potential to transfer these skills to a new pool of trainers and mentors in the future.



“The YMC has given us opportunities to sharpen our analysis about how we do our political work, our campaign work ... When we are thinking about the media ... it always comes back to how strategically we are thinking about our campaigns.”

3 THE YMC STRENGTHENED YOUTH ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS AND YOUTH ORGANIZING GROUPS

The YMC strengthened youth organizing campaigns and organizations through their media capacity-building program and media skills training. The YMC organized their media skills training as a school for youth organizers and developed curriculum that was integrated into groups’ media capacity-building projects. Tailored training and coaching helped groups to:

- strengthen their overall organizing strategies,
- use media to influence decisionmakers inside and outside of formal campaigns, and
- use media effectively in coalition-based campaigns to influence the public debate and win their demands.

STRENGTHENED CAMPAIGNS AND DEVELOPED TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

The YMC’s support helped youth organizations strengthen their overall campaign strategies and develop transferable skills. This support went beyond simply adding media as a tool to their current campaigns. The YMC helped groups think more strategically about their campaigns and their analysis, messages, demands, targets and actions. As a program director at Youth Making a Change put it:

The YMC has given us opportunities to sharpen our analysis about how we do our political work, our campaign work ... When we are thinking about the media ... it always comes back to how strategically we are thinking about our campaigns. More than any other intermediary, the YMC has forced us to be tighter about how we think about our campaigns and media strategies.

INFLUENCED DECISIONMAKERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF FORMAL CAMPAIGNS

Some groups have not yet integrated media work into their campaigns, but they found that the skills they learned in conducting analysis, developing messages and serving as spokespeople still contributed to their ability to win their demands. They used these same skills to communicate their message to constituents and decisionmakers. Asian Immigrant Women Advocates used these skills to win demands with the school district in their language rights campaign without ever going to the media. After identifying their goals, messages and targets, they crafted key messages and communicated them effectively to students, teachers and school-system decisionmakers.

Other groups used media to influence decisionmakers without organizing formal campaigns. The Center for Young Women’s Development has used media to change the way decisionmakers in the juvenile justice system think about their work with young women. By



“...When organizers used media to pressure their target, they had a level of power they had never experienced before, and decisionmakers were listening.”

using local and national media coverage of their work, they have been able to project their message and model:

The National Center for Crime and Delinquency wants to make us the state model for working with young women who are getting out of institutions to say, “This is what rehabilitation looks like.” They found out about us from an article in The San Francisco Chronicle even though they are also based in the Bay Area.

INFLUENCED THE PUBLIC DEBATE AND WON KEY DEMANDS

Among all YMC members, the three most powerful and effective media campaigns were those housed in coalitions with significant capacity: AYPAL in the One Love, One Nation campaign, Let’s Get Free and PUEBLO in the No on FF campaign, and Youth Force Coalition in the Stop the Superjail campaign. These coalitions used media to amplify their voice, influence decisionmakers and access power in an unprecedented way. In the process of integrating media strategy into their overall campaign, organizers realized they were thinking differently about their work:

When we planned actions the idea wasn’t just to have the actual action to put pressure on the target, but for the media coverage to put pressure on the target.

Media amplified groups’ power and voice. All three coalitions found that when organizers used media to pressure their target, they had a level of power they had never experienced before, and decisionmakers were listening. In the case of AYPAL, whose campaign drew attention to the devastating impact of deportations on immigrant families, media was key to winning Congresswoman Barbara Lee as an ally to their cause:

“...Organizers found that media helped them to shift public opinion. When Let’s Get Free decided to start organizing around a local ballot initiative, Measure FF ... the approval rating was 90 percent ... By the end of the campaign, support dropped to 52 percent.”

We had a really simple request, which was for Congresswoman Lee to sponsor this bill that was out in Congress. And that’s just as easy as her calling and saying, “Put my name on the bill.” But it was taking a long time. It was taking forever. And I think putting it out in the media put on pressure for her to speed things up. It actually brought it more to the surface. Aside from our demand being met, we were able to bring more public attention to the issue of deportation.

Strategic messages can change the terms of the debate. Similarly, these coalitions found that strategically crafted messages could turn the terms of public debate in their favor. Youth Force Coalition successfully used media to put pressure on local and state decision-makers and stop efforts to build a giant new detention facility for young people in Alameda County. (See Case Study: Stop the Superjail). The oversized juvenile detention center became known as “The Superjail for Youth.” Similarly, other campaigns used messaging to change the terms of the debate: Oakland’s initiative to put more cops on the street was successfully reframed as “a band-aid solution for crimes” related to poverty where prevention programs, not punishment, had long been proven more effective. And after AYPAL’s campaign, people understood that deportations were “tearing families apart.” In all three examples, messages allowed young organizers to successfully frame the issue and ultimately win their demands.

Media helped groups shift public opinion and win. In all three campaigns organizers found that media helped them to shift public opinion. When Let’s Get Free and PUEBLO decided to start organizing around a local ballot initiative, Measure FF, which would put 100 new cops on the streets of Oakland, the approval rating of the measure was 90 percent. One youth organizer describes the subsequent change of perception:

Before we decided to organize around FF, people were basically going to vote for it because the language on the ballot was so deceiving. In 2002-03 there was so much violence in Oakland it was not funny. And when people think, “What’s the solution to crime and violence?” a lot of people automatically think “police.” Our success was really about changing people’s awareness and attitudes about crime and about what young people need.

By the end of the campaign, support for FF dropped to 52 percent. And, while the initiative technically passed, the tax measure to fund it lost. By using the media, youth organizers turned an uncontested proposal on policing into a controversy.

Without a strong media strategy it is highly unlikely that any of these groups would have had a victory. But by building strong coalitions that used media, all three successfully amplified the voices of youth and community-driven solutions.

STOP THE SUPERJAIL!

THE YOUTH FORCE COALITION'S CAMPAIGN TO "STOP THE SUPERJAIL" IN ALAMEDA COUNTY ILLUSTRATED THE AMAZING POTENTIAL AND THE POWER YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE WHEN THEY USE MEDIA STRATEGY IN THE CONTEXT OF ORGANIZING.

In April 2001, Bay Area youth organizers were still charged from the fight against Proposition 21, which drastically increased youth criminalization, fortified three-strikes legislation and allowed minors to be tried and incarcerated as adults. Even though the proposition had passed, the campaign had mobilized thousands of Bay Area youth, raised consciousness about youth incarceration and generated dynamic organizations like Youth Force Coalition, a broad coalition of youth organizing groups. So, when Alameda County supervisors revealed their plans to dramatically expand and relocate the county's juvenile hall using state and federal funds, young people were ready to organize.

Youth Force Coalition soon joined forces with Books Not Bars, an adult-led coalition housed at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, and launched the "Stop the Superjail Campaign" to fight the proposal. Their goals were to reduce the size of the facility, shift its location to one that was more accessible to families, and transfer funding toward alternatives and prevention programs instead of mass incarceration. Over the next 12 months the coalition successfully used a combination of organizing tactics and media strategy to win their demands.

From the beginning it was clear that the campaign needed a strong media strategy. Early in the campaign, Books Not Bars was able to successfully message the issue by framing the proposed project as a "Superjail"—as it would have been the largest per capita youth prison in the nation. Youth organizers were able to understand the power of this message and run with it. Later, they reflected on the importance of media messaging for winning their campaigns demands:

You know, just calling it the "Superjail"—very few people would say, "I'm in support of a Superjail for kids." Having the media savvy to frame the campaign, naming the fight in a way that gave us a lot of leverage and a lot of power ... it placed our opposition in a bad position.

The Youth Media Council worked with the Youth Force Coalition to do an assessment of their media work and then create and implement a media plan with the organizers. The primary goal of the plan was to win the demands of the Superjail campaign by projecting youth voice into the public debate. This was designed to complement the highly successful media work that Books Not Bars (BNB) was already doing by recognizing the need for youth spokespeople in a debate dominated by politicians, police and prosecutors. The media plan included training youth spokespeople, creating strategic messages and using their youth event "Not Down with the Lockdown" as a hook for feature stories.

As the youth organizers' confidence and media skills rose, the public face of the campaign shifted:

At the beginning of the campaign a lot of the coverage has BNB spokespeople and at the end of the campaign all the media coverage has YFC spokespeople. Their ability to control the debate, to soundbite a message, all those things improved tremendously and you could see it in video footage. This happened once we started doing the media training with youth leaders.



The campaign was particularly effective in using well-planned actions, messages and media to put pressure on their targets. One of the lead youth organizers from the campaign, described the power they developed as they learned to use media effectively:

There was one action we did against the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. We had posters with the Supervisor's picture and our message. When you turned on the news coverage of this event, it was very, very clear who our target was and why we were there. And thanks to this, we actually had an impact on other supervisors, because they didn't want to be targeted.

Organizers realized that even if their target avoided their protests, TV and print news coverage would deliver their message and their demands for them.

As the campaign grew, so did their influence. After local papers started writing about Youth Force Coalition and the issue, statewide and even national papers picked up the story. An organizer on the campaign explained:

It became a statewide issue because we were going against state money ... We were actually pressuring the State Board of Corrections to take money out of the California budget because even though we were taking money away from this juvenile hall, it was definitely going to go somewhere else.

Through their media messaging and strategic organizing, Youth Force Coalition and Books Not Bars ultimately won their demands. By framing the issue as a "Superjail for kids," and getting the media to attach to that frame, the organizers were able to shape public opinion and put their targets on the defensive. As a result, the State Board of Corrections withdrew \$2.3 million dollars in pre-approved state funding for the new juvenile hall's construction, and the Alameda County Board of Supervisors agreed to cut the size of the hall in half (from 540 to 330 beds) and move the facility to Oakland, an accessible location for families.

By the end of the Superjail campaign the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran an editorial crediting the Youth Force Coalition for swaying the supervisors, winning their demands and ensuring that Alameda County was not going to criminalize young people. This recognition was incredibly significant and shows how far they had come.

The lessons from this project were similar to those for the YMC's other projects with coalition campaigns. Program Director Jennifer Soriano explains, "*We learned that not only is media access achievable for youth organizers, but there are real impacts and those impacts win key campaigns.*"

No holds barred

Friday, November 16, 2001 • The Sacramento Bee

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Protesters from Alameda County, including high school and middle school students from the Oakland area and homeowners from Dublin, stage a demonstration at the state Board of Corrections meeting in Sacramento. The activists rallied Thursday to oppose plans for a juvenile hall facility.

Oakland youths protest county 'superjail' plan

By Ed Fletcher
BEE CAPITOL BUREAU

With a bullhorn, colorful banners and a bulldogish determination to have their voices heard, a band of Oakland's young people converged Thursday on Sacramento to protest Alameda County's plan to build what they call a "superjail for kids."

About 60 activists, organized by Oakland-based groups Books Not Bars and Youth Force Coalition, turned the parking lot outside the state Board of Corrections' meeting facility into an impromptu rally after the board adjourned its morning meeting.

They never met with the full board, but left town after conversations with corrections officials convinced them that Alameda County could alter its plans without jeopardizing state money for the project.

"I think that the county officials have a lot of egg on their face now," said Van Jones, executive director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. "They have consistently said the Board of Corrections was poised to take the money if they modified the plan." County officials did not return phone calls from The Bee.

After winning the grant, the county in May, the board awarded



Alameda County \$33 million to build a 330-bed juvenile hall to replace what state officials called its "dilapidated" 299-bed facility.

After winning the grant, the county in May, the board awarded

► PROTEST, page A4

Van Jones of Oakland's Books Not Bars speaks through a bullhorn as Board of Corrections member Curtis Hill, right, listens in Sacramento.

OVER THE COURSE OF THE CAMPAIGN, YOUTH FORCE COALITION GARNERED UNPRECEDENTED COVERAGE THAT CAPTURED THE MESSAGE, PROBLEM AND COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON EXPANSION. BY INCREASING CREDIBLE YOUTH VOICES IN COVERAGE, YFC SIMULTANEOUSLY COUNTERED MEDIA STEREOTYPES OF APATHETIC YOUNG PEOPLE, AND PUT A HUMAN FACE ON THE TREND OF MASS INCARCERATION. IN THE END, THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE PUBLISHED AN EDITORIAL ECHOING THE CAMPAIGN'S MESSAGE AND CREDITING YFC WITH STOPPING THE NATION'S LARGEST PROPOSED 'SUPERJAIL' FOR YOUTH.

REFRAMING POWER

22

Teens Gain in Fight Against Jail

Alameda County: Using nonviolent tactics of the civil rights movement, minority youths win reductions in the size, funding of juvenile hall.

By JOHN M. GLIONNA
TIMES STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND—Rocio Nieves is a shy teenager from a blue-collar family in east Oakland, a struggling single mother not used to exercising her political voice.

But there she was at a state Board of Corrections meeting this summer, poised beside others from her Bay Area youth group, the hip-hoppers, skateboarders and would-be street poets who had come before the shirt-and-tie crowd to criticize a proposed 540-bed juvenile jail.

In a tense scene, the minority youths stormed the meeting—adopting protest tactics their grandparents used during the civil rights movement. One by one, sometimes shouting over board members, the teens argued that California already had too many "superjails" for young people and that the money would be better spent on prevention programs.

"I told them the new juvenile jail in Alameda County was gonna be built right across the street from the adult jail—so all the young offenders could just look out the window to see their futures," Nieves recalled. "What kind of message is that to send our kids?"

Using nonviolent rallies and sit-ins at which some group members have been arrested, their



Rocio Nieves, a member of a youth group that is fighting plans to build a new juvenile jail in Alameda County, says, "I'm trying to better my community. I want in on this debate."

"Books Not Bars" campaign has blasted officials for fast-tracking a "monstrosity" that would be, relative to the county's population, one of the largest juvenile halls in America.

Organizers say the campaign Please see YOUTHS, B9

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San Francisco Chronicle

THE VOICE OF THE WEST

EDITORIALS

Less jail, more hope

AFTER TWO years of mostly contentious debate, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors on May 6 decided to build a new juvenile justice complex — but not the so-called "super jail" that had inflamed so much public passion. The board junked that notion — of a super-size 540-bed prison in Dublin — and settled on a 360-bed facility in San Leandro near the 50-year-old, dilapidated dungeon it plans to replace.

The proposed "super jail" in Dublin made little sense. It would have been too far away for many families to easily visit, particularly parents who ought to be present when their children go to court.

But mostly, at nearly twice the size of the old place, the mammoth structure sent the wrong message. It signaled low expectations for youths and an admission of defeat for a society that should be putting its resources into ways to help build pro-

ductive lives for young people.

"History shows that if you build it, you will fill it," said Supervisor Keith Carson. "A smaller facility encourages us to look at alternatives before our kids are jailed."

Certainly, the San Leandro site is centrally located, easily reachable by public transit and much cheaper to build.

It's a wise decision that might not have been made without prodding from the people it affects the most — young people. The Youth Force Coalition, a network of Bay Area youth groups, relentlessly lobbied the county supervisors.

"Young people participated in the process," said Carson. "They stayed the course and, in this case, showed that it pays off."

So, we applaud the ultimate decision, the board's willingness to listen and the tenacious young people who refused to go unheard.

5/20/03

4 THE YMC DEVELOPED AND TESTED A MEDIA CAPACITY MODEL THAT WORKS FOR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

In their first three years, the YMC demonstrated that youth from marginalized communities could understand and use media as part of their campaigns and as a tool to influence public opinion and decisionmakers. Many groups joined the YMC because they knew media was important; even so, they did not have the analysis, skills or infrastructure to integrate media into their work. By working with the YMC on capacity-building projects, member groups developed a sophisticated analysis of media, and the skills and relationships needed to integrate media strategy into their campaigns. At the same time, the YMC learned many lessons about their own practice and how intermediary organizations can build the capacity of grassroots youth organizing groups. In order to build their members' capacity the YMC learned they needed to:

- promote active learning by working with groups in real campaigns
- demystify the media through political education
- strengthen their groups' ability to create and implement media strategy
- strengthen their groups' ability to control the terms and outcomes of the media debate
- build infrastructure to sustain capacity in and among organizations, and
- create media skill-building curriculum and training tools relevant to youth and communities of color.

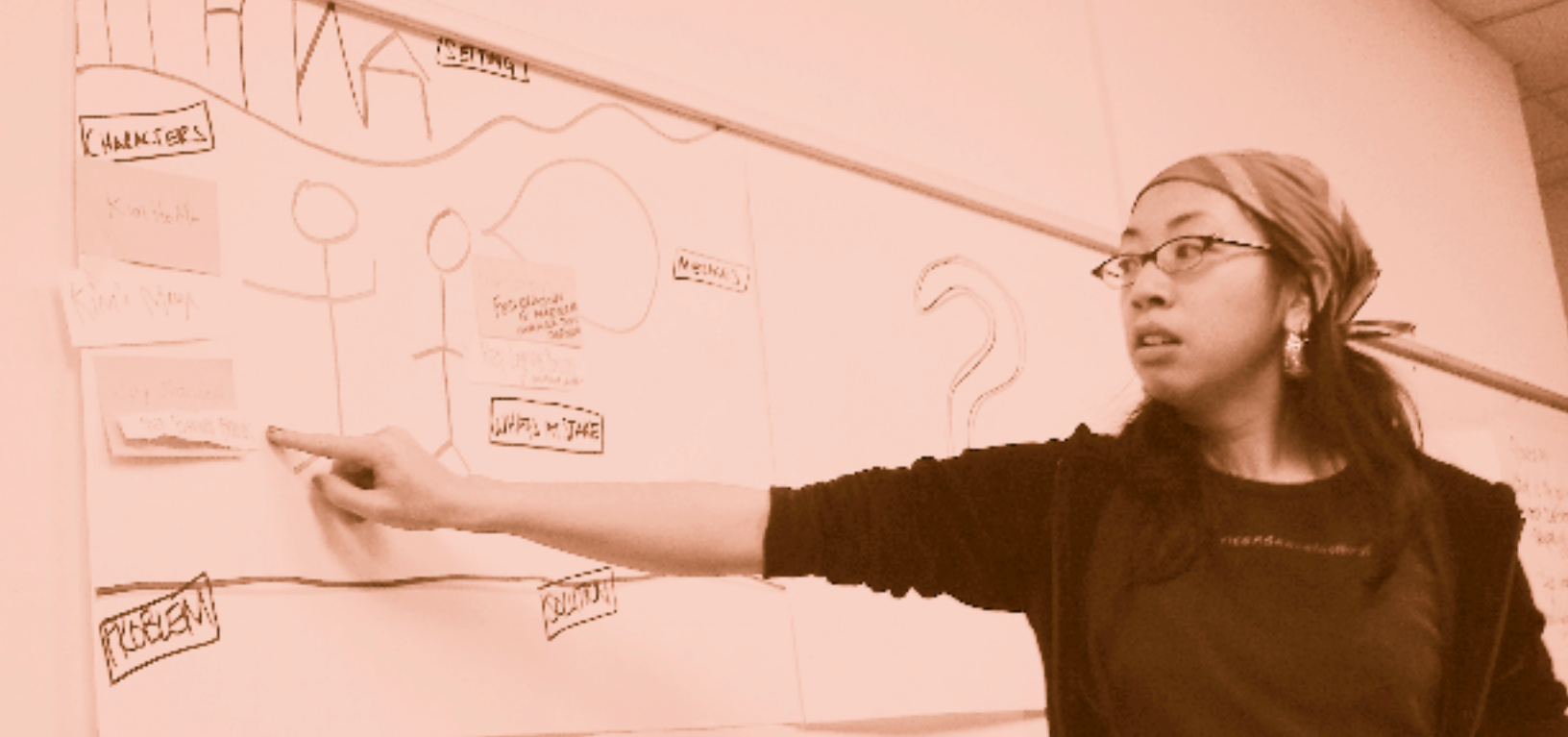
ACTIVE LEARNING: BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH DEEP, AUTHENTIC WORK

One of the most important lessons the YMC learned from their first three years was to focus their capacity-building work around "active learning." As opposed to one-time skills workshops, active learning ties training and media capacity building to the core program and campaign work of organizations. YMC staff member Jennifer Soriano, explains:

When I started, I was trying to build capacity in all of our organizations, whether or not they were conducting campaigns. And those projects without campaigns had limited effectiveness. The lesson we learned is that capacity building has to be applied through a campaign. Otherwise there is no urgency.

YMC member groups echoed this insight. Seven of the eight organizations said that the most effective YMC training they received was one-on-one coaching to develop media analysis, skills and strategy in the context of their actual work. AYPAL described the tailored support they received on their One Love, One Nation campaign:

It was really good to have YMC trainings before our actions, rallies and protests. Then have them with us at the event and after to do evaluation. Just to have them say, "You



know this is what we should do next time, and this is what you can change,” this was really good.

Often, organizers said the best learning happened when they needed to troubleshoot a “real-time” issue. One project director explained that having YMC support in their most challenging moments actually increased their strategic response because they were able to call the YMC for advice on what they should and shouldn’t do.

All members acknowledged that offering deep, tailored media capacity building can be challenging to provide, but they emphasized this approach had the deepest impact on their capacity:

I think it’s always a strategic question. Do you do more work that’s less deep with more people, or do you do deeper work with fewer people? I think the times when we’ve really benefited from work with [the YMC] it’s been with the deep work. This included regular communication, meetings, joint strategy development, weighing in on the campaign development process.

DEMYSTIFYING MEDIA: MEDIA CONSCIOUSNESS, LITERACY AND ANALYSIS

Across the board, member groups credited the YMC with helping to demystify the media to their members. YMC tools, such as the *Bay Area Media Map*, helped groups understand how the media operates and how they could use the news for their own purposes. Organizers explained that through developing a political analysis and understanding the mechanics of news production, media engagement became less intimidating:

*A lot of youth think the media is just monolithic and you’d really need to be hot **** to get in. But what YMC did was demystify the process. It’s just a matter of doing the legwork, pitching it to journalists correctly.*

Five groups, including those that do not have active campaigns, said they have integrated ongoing media analysis and monitoring into their work. One organizer in a multi-issue, multi-racial organization called this skill “media consciousness,” and credited it with having an even bigger impact on their work than any other specific tool. Their youth organizers now discuss media issues impacting their work, and analyze content at every meeting—something that

“...The YMC has helped the Bay Area youth movement develop a common language and strategy for accessing the media and holding outlets accountable.”

would not have happened three years earlier. Similarly, representatives of the seven other organizations said having an overall understanding of how the media operates and how it relates to their work has transformed the way they think about and use the news.

The YMC has helped their member groups create a shared analysis and pool of leaders who care about media as a strategy. By facilitating this process through individual projects and Council retreats, the YMC has helped the Bay Area youth movement develop a common language and strategy for accessing the media and holding outlets accountable. Organizers from six groups said developing this shared understanding was one of the most powerful outcomes of YMC retreats.

INTEGRATING MEDIA STRATEGY WITH CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

The YMC also helped all eight of their member groups effectively understand and apply media strategy within their campaigns. By collaborating with the YMC, groups learned that to be effective media must be integrated from the very beginning of a campaign. An organizer from AYPAL explained:

Working with media is not just sending a press release or calling a reporter a week or two in advance, but the preparation. In a way it's a parallel campaign. While you are trying to organize and mobilize people, on the other side you are trying to organize and mobilize the media.

Groups identified a number of specific skills they learned to mobilize media: developing campaign messages, identifying news hooks, pitching, writing press releases, developing spokespeople and using the media to highlight victories. Above all, they re-learned that organizing takes persistence. As one member noted:

We called all sorts of media and not just the supervisory chiefs, but their secretaries as well. We made sure they knew who we were every time we called. We also tried to have meetings with them, and sent them stuff through fax and email, so they knew who we were and so we would get some kind of response back from them.

CONTROLLING THE DEBATE: FRAMING, MESSAGING AND SPOKESPERSON TRAINING

Rather than a lot of formal training, the best things we've learned are how to be hardnosed with reporters. Now when we have interviews we are really clear with our young women, "Do not do this; do this..." —YMC member, Center for Young Women's Development

A fundamental skill in YMC's media capacity-building work is spokesperson training, which prepares groups to engage with the media and control the debate. All eight groups identified spokesperson training as one of the most concrete, valuable skills they learned in the process of working with the YMC. Through understanding messages, soundbites and how to stay on message when talking to reporters, organizers developed a confidence they did not have before:

Our members now understand they need to have a level of discipline about what the message is. So it's not just getting up there and talking about whatever comes to mind, but there is a point that they want to make.

This skill is particularly valuable because it is transferable to other areas of organizing, including public speaking, membership recruitment and advocacy. Not surprisingly, spokesperson training was the most requested training of the YMC. One organizer from AYPAL described how his group's entire perception changed through spokesperson training and practice:

We've developed a critical understanding that all messages exist within a bigger framing story, and that we actually can construct messages that work in a different framework. We can break down one message and build up our own message in the media.



BUILDING MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE IN AND AMONGST YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

When the YMC first started, their priority was to build media capacity and infrastructure within each individual organization, but the staff soon realized that this was not enough. Instead, they found it was even more important to create centralized tools and resources to sustain media capacity in the youth organizing sector as a whole. Over the past three years, the YMC has built this infrastructure by supporting groups to develop internal systems and structures to support their own work, and by creating centralized tools and media leaders to support sector-level capacity.

Internal systems: media monitoring, media intake and media teams. The YMC helped their member groups develop some basic media systems to integrate media work into their overall organizing strategy. This included creating media monitoring systems, media intake systems and structures to develop and manage media strategy during their campaigns. Three organizations specifically mentioned how they integrated media monitoring of their issues into their work. Youth organizers read the paper regularly and integrate analysis and discussion of current events into their group's membership meetings. Several other groups talked about how the YMC helped them develop systems for managing their interactions with journalists. Still others talked about the structures they created for developing and carrying out media strategy in the organization. AYPAL stands out in this regard. Through their work on the One Love, One Nation campaign, AYPAL created a media team that was responsible for carrying out the entire media arm of the campaign. By creating a specialized team, AYPAL found that their media work became more sophisticated and members of the

“As part of the effort to create centralized tools and resources, the YMC has created a media skill-building curriculum designed to meet the needs of youth and people of color. ... By modeling trainings and training trainers, the YMC was able to pass on tools to leaders who could use them within their organizations.”

team developed stronger media skills. They have since institutionalized this team as part of their organizational structure.

Centralized resources, tools and media leaders. In order to build sustainable media infrastructure for the Bay Area youth organizing sector, the YMC identified that organizers needed access to sophisticated media tools and resources. Over three years, the YMC created centralized tools such as the *Bay Area Media Map*, specialized curriculum and the online Youth Movement Press Database. All eight member groups, and 16 additional organizations, have used the Press Database in their organizing.

At the same time YMC was developing centralized tools, staff saw the need to deemphasize their role in providing one-time trainings. Instead, they began to provide comprehensive training for a core of leaders and trainers who could provide ongoing leadership development to their peers. YMC staff explained:

We realized that doing all those trainings was not very effective, because according to our goals we're not just trying to project youth voice as a youth leadership development opportunity; we want to project one voice, a coordinated strategic voice.

The YMC is still experimenting with this strategy, but member groups confirmed the need for centralized tools and more trainers.

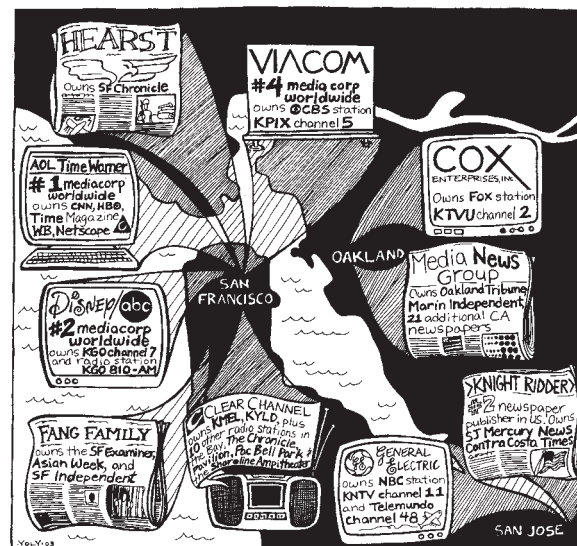
PROVIDING RELEVANT MEDIA SKILLS-BUILDING CURRICULUM

As part of the effort to create centralized tools and resources, the YMC has created a media skill-building curriculum designed to meet the needs of youth and people of color. Through the Global Justice Media School in year two, the YMC trained 14 leaders from 12 youth organizations in basic media skills. Three organizations specifically spoke about how they integrated this media skills training into their core curriculum. Y-MAC noted:

YMC helped us strengthen our basic curriculum. Now Media 101 is in our core trainings and it didn't used to be. We know what media monitoring is and we didn't used to.

By modeling trainings and training trainers, the YMC was able to pass on tools to leaders who could use them within their organizations. YMC member groups would like to see this curriculum documented so that it can be better distributed among organizations and trainers. At least three groups want YMC to develop a clear set of training materials and a guide for developing media plans for organizations. One group mentioned the SPIN Project's training materials as a model.

WHO OWNS NEWS
IN THE BAY?



FROM YMC'S BAY AREA MEDIA MAP, 2003



AYPAL'S ONE LOVE, ONE NATION, STOP DEPORTATION CAMPAIGN

AYPAL (Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership) is a 300-member youth organizing group based in the Bay Area. In 2003, AYPAL organizers decided to take on the issue of immigrant deportation and challenge the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). The Act mandates the detention and deportation of non-citizens convicted of crimes with sentences of one year or more. Since IIRIRA was passed, deportation levels have risen dramatically, the majority of which were for nonviolent crimes and misdemeanors. Youth in AYPAL were experiencing the impact of IIRIRA first hand as hundreds of families in their community were torn apart. They launched the One Love, One Nation, Stop Deportation campaign to repeal the 1996 IIRIRA and bring more attention to the issue.

In order to win this controversial campaign with national impact, AYPAL knew it needed to have a sharp media strategy. However, up until this point, AYPAL had focused on local issues and put little energy into media. As a result, they had almost no media experience from their past campaigns.

The YMC decided to partner with AYPAL because the group met their criteria for a successful media capacity-building project: **(1) Political necessity:** AYPAL was working on criminalization and immigrant rights, wedge issues central to advancing racial and economic justice; **(2) Organizational readiness:** AYPAL had more than two staff people and a large youth leadership and member base; and **(3) Campaign readiness:** AYPAL had an active campaign to demand that Representative Barbara Lee co-sponsor a bill to reform the 1996 IIRIRA.

YMC's capacity-building goals for working with AYPAL were:

- 1 To strengthen AYPAL's One Love, One Nation, Stop Deportation campaign by integrating media strategy into their campaign strategy
- 2 To train a corps of AYPAL youth to lead and conduct campaign media work
- 3 To document the process as a model for other youth organizing groups to replicate

Over the next nine months, YMC staff worked intensively with the eight AYPAL interns who formed the campaign's media team. This was the first time that AYPAL had a team dedicated to media work. One of the media interns recalled the team's weekly meetings with YMC:

YMC's training started with an overview of the media landscape and a crash course in media literacy—who controls the media, what gets in, how it works. We then took that information and applied it to our campaign and developed an argument that would be compelling to journalists. From there we just started crafting press releases, calling up journalists, canvassing. Then, it was just a matter of legwork, getting journalists to show up to our events and providing a compelling argument.

As a result of their hard work and the production of a data-based report on the impacts of IIRIRA, the team was able to frame the campaign in a way that appealed to a mass audience. Their message of deportations “tearing families apart” hit a chord with the public and with decisionmakers, especially when they backed it up with data and the stories of real people impacted by the IIRIRA. The AYPAL staff coordinator talked about the significance of using media as a youth organization:

One of the things we realized was that it was difficult for us to influence Congresswoman Barbara Lee as a youth organization. A lot of us are under 18, can't vote and are coming from immigrant communities. But when we made the issue public through the media, we were able to take our message much further and make Congresswoman Lee much more accountable.

It was the first time that AYPAL had developed an overall media strategy as opposed to simply conducting one-time media tactics. The results were as follows:

- **AYPAL's campaign was strengthened.** AYPAL won the primary demand of getting Barbara Lee to co-sponsor the non-compromise bill “Keeping Families Together Act” to reform the 1996 IIRIRA.
- **AYPAL gained access to media and developed relationships with mediamakers.** AYPAL earned more media coverage than ever before, and worked with reporters to develop in-depth stories on the issue of deportation.
- **AYPAL exposed racism.** AYPAL confronted stereotypes in media and highlighted the racist rules of immigration law enforcement agencies like the Department of Homeland Security and its effects on Asian and Latino communities.
- **AYPAL showed youth-led organizing and communications work.** Youth chose a strategy that AYPAL staff thought was too ambitious, including producing a report and organizing “no-deportation zone” block parties, culminating in a media event to release the report on the anniversary of the Cambodian Repatriation Act. The successful outcomes of the campaign showed that youth-led organizing and communications can work when given adequate staff, expert and intermediary guidance.
- **AYPAL built alliances.** The YMC helped AYPAL build alliances with other intermediaries such as the Datacenter for research support, and with API Force, a local coalition, for case studies of affected people.
- **AYPAL institutionalized its own media team.** Having learned that successful media work takes time and dedicated media point people, AYPAL created a permanent media team to learn media advocacy skills and implement media work in its future campaigns.

While the YMC capacity-building project with AYPAL was successful, it also highlighted the limitations of this approach. Intensive capacity building was challenging for the YMC because it required a tremendous amount of YMC resources, from staff time to money for outside trainers. As a result, the YMC's work with other member groups dropped. While the YMC has decided that continuing with this strategy is not the best use of their resources, the project helped the YMC deepen their expertise and develop insight for how to shape future capacity-building projects.

“The youth organizers working with the YMC positioned themselves as official sources with the analysis, skills and affiliation to speak with authority as representatives of a larger group of people.”

5 THE YMC SHIFTED YOUNG PEOPLE’S RELATIONSHIP AND ACCESS TO MEDIA

The YMC helped shift young people’s relationship and access to media by:

- helping groups challenge media bias about youth,
- helping groups transform their interactions with the press,
- brokering relationships between youth and reporters,
- creating avenues for youth organizers to hold the media accountable, and
- establishing the YMC as a reliable source for young progressive voices.

CHALLENGED MEDIA BIAS ABOUT YOUTH

The political conception of high school students is, “Oh, they don’t know anything and they don’t care.” To have them on TV and articulate about the issues, it was a way of changing the situation so youth actually are in the media as opposed to just being talked about. —YMC member, AYPAL

Through their capacity-building support, the YMC helped youth organizing groups access media and shift the debate about their issues. Young organizers found they were able to change how reporters talked about their issues and constituents, which resulted in a change in public perception. By establishing young people as experts and media spokespeople on hot issues, the YMC helped to counter the general perception of youth as “bad,” “apathetic” and “out of control,” which had pervaded the media since the 1990s. With YMC support, young organizers were able to challenge media stereotypes and place more humanizing, complex stories about youth and the issues impacting their communities in the press.

For example, when the executive director of the Center for Young Women’s Development (CYWD) received a MacArthur Genius Award, the YMC and CYWD strategized to use the opportunity to challenge media bias about young, incarcerated women and keep the focus on the organization’s work for juvenile justice. Other organizers also found that they were also able to shift common stereotypes through their media campaigns. AYPAL’s media work in the One Love, One Nation campaign put a human face on deportation by telling the stories of children and families impacted by punitive immigration law. Youth Force Coalition debunked the media myth of skyrocketing juvenile crime by contrasting the actual decrease in crime rates with the rise in public spending on incarceration. Organizers consistently felt a new sense of agency as they effectively challenged bias in the news.



SECOND ANNUAL YOUTH-JOURNALIST
ROUNDTABLE, 2003

TRANSFORMED YOUTH ORGANIZERS' INTERACTIONS WITH THE PRESS

The new power that these groups and their spokespeople felt helped to transform their general interactions with the press as well as their coverage. Rather than feeling powerless, organizers from all eight of the YMC member groups said they began to feel like they had a right to set some of the terms and expectations. For example, the Center for Young Women's Development started to tell reporters what they wanted, both in terms of how young women were represented and how they participated in the editorial process. In one situation, a *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter contacted CYWD for a story. They did not like the reporting she had done about girls in juvenile hall and mistrusted her as reporter, so their first instinct was to refuse the story. But they ultimately decided to let her come to their group:

Instead of telling her what we didn't like, we said out loud to the group, "We have a reporter here and don't let her define you, we're going to define ourselves today." So we were really clear about the instructions to the group while she was there. She actually talked about that in the article.

Representatives of five organizations with active media campaigns and one without reported similar experiences. For many of these young organizers, it was the first time they felt empowered to engage with reporters and the first time they saw young people speaking on issues that impact their communities in a sophisticated way. While young people are sometimes included in stories about youth issues, they are generally represented as individuals, not experts. The youth organizers working with the YMC positioned themselves as official sources with the analysis, skills and affiliation to speak with authority as representatives of a larger group of people.

While this confidence surprised many journalists, it helped them write better, more powerful stories. Several journalists now contact the YMC regularly to get sources for their work.

BROKERED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUTH AND REPORTERS

YMC member groups all see tremendous potential in the YMC's role as a bridge-builder between organizers and journalists. Five groups specifically said their own members felt empowered through the coordinated press briefings, delegation meetings to outlets and the annual YMC youth-journalist roundtables. They appreciated the opportunity to brief journalists on issues and to direct criticism and feedback to news outlets. In most cases, organizers felt their relationships to journalists were short-lived; however, they believed that

“YMC member groups all see tremendous potential in the YMC’s role as a bridge-builder between organizers and journalists. Five groups specifically said their own members felt empowered through the coordinated press briefings, delegation meetings to outlets and the annual YMC youth-journalist roundtables.”

these forums helped YMC, and by extension their members, develop ongoing relationships with media outlets.

At the collective level, several concrete outcomes came from these meetings. After releasing the report *Speaking for Ourselves* on KTVU Channel 2’s coverage of youth, the YMC developed a partnership with KTVU to host the first annual youth-journalist roundtable. The YMC used this model the following year to host a second annual youth-journalist roundtable with ABC-Univision.

Since organizing the annual youth-journalist roundtables, journalists have started coming to the YMC for story ideas and sources, breaking down an important barrier for youth organizers. In one case, the roundtable helped a group develop a strong, ongoing contact at a media outlet:

I was able to make a direct connection with [a reporter] there and it helped us grow the relationship so much more. We felt more comfortable calling them and they felt more comfortable taking calls from us because they knew exactly who we were and it was a lot more personal by then.

Another powerful example is YMC’s relationship-building with KMEL and Clear Channel. After YMC released the study *Is KMEL the People’s Station?: A Community Assessment of 106.1 KMEL*, members met with KMEL/Clear Channel staff and secured two hours of prime airtime, which they used to organize a live speakout with youth speakers addressing violence in the community and the at-home impacts of war-spending. (This outcome is further described in Finding 7).

Member groups also had feedback on how these opportunities could be improved. Two members said the youth-journalist roundtables needed stronger facilitation in order to balance youth and adult voices. Four suggested that the messages presented at the roundtable be more focused. Seven suggested that the YMC continue to broker relationships between press and youth organizations, since there is a high turnover in both. Still others wanted more issue-based editorial meetings set up with outlets around the Bay Area.

BUILT STRUCTURES FOR MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY

In order to successfully use the media as a tool for change and accountability from political decisionmakers, the YMC identified that youth organizers also needed to hold media outlets themselves accountable. To this end, the YMC pioneered tools for organizers to hold media outlets accountable and organize around media policy. In addition to the face-to-face meetings mentioned above, these tools include community-led content analysis studies, recommendations for journalists and tips for organizers. Through their accountability studies, the YMC has built significant partnerships with media outlets like KTVU Channel 2 and 106.1 KMEL, as well as engaged youth organizing groups such as Y-MAC and Let’s Get Free to confront the criminalization of youth. The YMC continues to experiment with how to accomplish this area of work (see Finding 7).

USED CULTURE TO CAPTURE MEDIA ATTENTION

For organizations and communities whose representatives rarely get quoted in media coverage, creative visuals can be one of the most effective ways to get a message across. Several YMC member groups discussed the importance of showing, not just telling, their message to the public through good visual props, rich sounds and creative dramatic actions. For example, AYPAL used Korean Drummers, a Dragon Dance and well-designed oversized placards to get their point across at a media event on the eve of the Cambodian Repatriation Act. As a result, the event won coverage on four TV stations, six radio stations and five print outlets.



ORGANIZERS FROM THE STOP THE SUPERJAIL CAMPAIGN STAGE A VISUAL DEMONSTRATION TO KEEP THEIR MESSAGE IN THE PRESS

Even when a story has ceased to be “newsworthy,” a dramatic, visual action can catch the attention of photojournalists. Organizers of the Stop the Superjail campaign found that late in their campaign they were able to keep their issue alive by dramatizing it in action:

Even late in the campaign, when it wasn't newsworthy anymore, we did an action where a bunch of our members wore ankle cuffs and were linked up to each other and did a little skit about disproportionate minority confinement, and so we actually got a photo in the middle of a text box in the news the next day, and so that was what was newsworthy, the visual and being creative.

BECAME A CENTRALIZED, RELIABLE SOURCE FOR YOUNG PROGRESSIVE VOICES

In a dream world, the YMC would be a broker for youth organizers in the media. When opportunities come up they would be the brokers between local, regional and national media. Young people would actually have the skills to deliver a powerful and unique message. —YMC member, Center for Young Women's Development

As the YMC developed stronger relationships with the media and a stronger pool of youth spokespeople, local and national reporters started to see the YMC as a source for young, articulate voices. This is the result of an intentional effort to build relationships between young people and the media, starting with editorial meetings and the youth-journalist roundtables organized by the YMC, and continuing with the YMC's growing national presence as a media justice organization. As the potential and demand for youth spokespeople grew, the YMC began to play a valuable role as a central broker for relationships between young people and the media. Where many youth organizations struggled to maintain their media capacity outside of their campaigns, the YMC was able to coordinate and centralize communications work for their members. This enabled the larger group to take advantage of timely local and national media opportunities. YMC staff noted:

Over the past year we have had a couple of national media opportunities through Nickelodeon, ABC World News Tonight and CNN. We've taken these opportunities in the context of trying to project our model nationally and working to insert local voices into the national debate.

In the Nickelodeon opportunity (see Case Study: Amplifying Youth Voice), the YMC placed progressive youth voices into election-year debates. This is a rare example of a coordinated effort to have the voices of young, grassroots organizers of color speaking to a national audience on issues of national importance. In a similar way, through an opportunity on ABC's *World News Tonight* YMC members inserted their voices in the discussion of the controversial coverage of the U.S. War on Iraq. Similarly, on CNN the YMC staff debated the author of a National Institute of Health study on the state of America's children. The lessons learned from this work showed that by centralizing communications work among their members, the YMC is able to have a much more powerful impact on media than if any one of their members did communications work on its own.



AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICE: THE YMC ON NICKELODEON

A powerful, emerging role for the YMC is their position as relationship broker between national media and progressive youth spokespeople. The YMC has growing credibility with local and national mediamakers as a reliable source for articulate, young voices on current issues. A good example of how the YMC has been able to project youth voices into national debates is the example of Nickelodeon's 2004 election coverage.

Nickelodeon approached the YMC after a network representative saw YMC Executive Director Malkia Cyril speak at the 2003 Free Press & Media Reform Conference. They were looking for "urban youth voices" on their show highlighting youth issues in the 2004 elections and knew that the YMC had trained youth spokespeople. The YMC grabbed the opportunity to influence election coverage:

We looked at it as an opportunity to project progressive youth voice into what otherwise would be a conservative debate. Nickelodeon was really grateful to have a centralized place to connect with a progressive youth voice. And actually, we wound up connecting them with young people in Seattle and Boston as well.

To prepare for the opportunity, the YMC pulled together youth organizers from their member organizations and conducted message development and spokesperson workshops. The YMC helped their spokespersons develop messages on key issues, from the economy to the environment. Eight out of 10 of the YMC spokespersons aired on Nickelodeon's half-hour election show, and the network continued to air segments of the show in the months preceding the election. YMC staff said two messages in particular stood out from the show:

One of them was a message delivered by a young woman from the Center for Young Women's Development about jobs and the economy and how young people are having to drop out of school to support their families. The other was an environmental justice message by a young woman from LEJ [Literacy for Environmental Justice], who stated that the degradation of the environment was directly related to corporate irresponsibility.

Through this experience the YMC developed an ongoing relationship with Nickelodeon. As a follow up, the YMC helped to place two other young people on Nickelodeon's "Hispanic Heritage Show," and the YMC remains in contact with the network about other opportunities.

“Over the past three years the YMC’s model has matured, enabling them to play the unique role of a base-building intermediary: an organizer of organizations.”

6 *THE YMC BUILT A UNIQUE MODEL FOR SUSTAINING MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE YOUTH MOVEMENT*

In their first three years, the YMC built a unique model for supporting strategic communications and media accountability work in the Bay Area’s youth movement. In this short period, the YMC transitioned from a temporary capacity-building project housed in a small parent organization to a critical institution of the Bay Area youth movement. The YMC has made their road by walking it—creating infrastructure and a model to reflect their principles and values. This is best reflected in YMC’s centralized tools, governance structure, staff structure and policies.

CENTRALIZED EXPERTISE, SUPPORT AND TOOLS

The YMC is a true learning organization, continually deepening their own analysis and expertise. Seven of the eight member groups said they appreciate the accessibility and knowledge of the staff, and value the centralized support they receive. A key lesson learned from their start-up period is that centralizing expertise and resources is one of the most important contributions the YMC can make to the youth and racial justice movements. Early on, the YMC’s work was primarily focused on building media capacity in individual organizations. One of the challenges to this approach is the high turnover and limited resources of individual youth organizations (see Challenges section), making it hard for groups to sustain, let alone deepen, capacity on their own. By centralizing media expertise, the YMC can provide continuity and a space to deepen this collective skill.

The YMC has already begun to develop resources and tools based on their work with members. They include online resources like the Youth Movement Press Database and publications like the *Bay Area Media Map*. While members’ awareness of these tools varied greatly—a third of the groups said they are actively using these resources and others were not aware of them—it was obvious they all had benefited from the information and knowledge through direct work with YMC staff. As the YMC refines and strengthens their tools, they are filling a unique niche by linking media strategy, youth organizing and racial justice work.

While centralizing expertise is important, it’s also clear that the YMC was successful in building the capacity of youth organizing groups through one-on-one mentorship and coaching. To be successful, the YMC must expand their training pool by training trainers from the community. Their potential to do this is clear from the leadership development work described in Finding 2. The YMC is now in a position to draw from their hands-on experience working with leaders and members of youth organizations to develop curriculum that is culturally relevant to youth organizers of color.



YMC 2004

Additionally, as discussed in Finding 5, the YMC was effective when they operated as a centralized public relations/communications hub for the youth movement. By centralizing message development and spokespeople, they were able to take advantage of local and national media opportunities and insert progressive youth voices into key public debates. All eight member groups said they value this access to advice, journalist contacts and coordinated media opportunities. While a few organizations may have been able to respond to some of these opportunities on their own, coordination enabled groups to be more strategic, efficient and sophisticated.

STRUCTURES FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND COORDINATION

The centralized work of the YMC has been possible because of their commitment to relationship building and coordination. While there are other nonprofit organizations focused on media training and public relations, the YMC is the only one that has designed their organization to support ongoing, coordinated media work for racial justice. To this end, the YMC has explicitly developed their Council membership structure to support a regional network of organizations that: a) brings their members together to build media skills and collective analysis, b) works in coordination to hold the media accountable, and c) shares media challenges and strategies. The Council is designed to be inclusive and participatory, with avenues for member groups to actively shape the structure and priorities of the organization. The process of developing this model has been challenging, but has enabled the YMC to build a strong network of organizations and expand regional media leadership.

Over the past three years the YMC's model has matured, enabling them to play the unique role of a base-building intermediary: an organizer of organizations. Overall, the organization has benefited from having the buy-in and insight of member organizations, and their evolving model illustrates the best thinking of this collective effort.

Seven of the eight member groups specifically said they appreciated the opportunity to share stories of media work in their campaigns with other groups, and develop a shared analysis of the media and its role in organizing. The YMC has done this effectively through

“The YMC not only survived, but also thrived at a time when many nonprofit organizations struggled, even closing their doors. This is a testament to the investment of YMC’s staff and their commitment to building a sound internal structure to support and sustain the work.”

their annual member retreats, one-on-one relationships with members and journalists, youth-journalist roundtables and editorial meetings, centralized tools, member listserve, leadership role in the media justice field and internal staff development. The main drawback of the Council model from members’ perspective is that participation can be intensive and not all YMC members have the capacity for this level of involvement.

STRUCTURES AND POLICIES TO SUSTAIN AND SUPPORT STAFF

The YMC not only survived, but also thrived at a time when many nonprofit organizations struggled, even closing their doors. This is a testament to the investment of YMC’s staff and their commitment to building a sound internal structure to support and sustain the work.

The YMC’s staff and staff policies reflect their politics and principles. In keeping with their commitment to building media leadership in marginalized communities, the YMC has built their staff by investing in the development of young people of color, women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (lgbtq) people. By hiring and investing in young people from the communities they serve, the YMC has put their commitment to building the media leadership of marginalized communities into action.

These values have also informed the YMC’s internal policies, by investing in structures that support the participation and sustainability of their staff. The YMC’s commitment to staff development and wellness is impressive and has helped to build an experienced and dedicated staff. It has also helped to retain staff despite the intensity of the work. Staff members are engaged at all stages of program planning and go through a collective month-long program planning session each year. The YMC has regular political development sessions where they discuss current ideas in the media justice and youth organizing fields. They also have staff development plans and budgets for each staff member to take advantage of leadership and skills-development opportunities. Finally, they offer funds to help staff pay for self-care that they would otherwise not be able to afford, staff “fun days” to support team building and flex time.

In addition to staff and wellness policies, the YMC has prioritized building an accountable and sustainable infrastructure. Through their partnership with their fiscal agent, the Movement Strategy Center, the YMC has shared information and resources to develop shared administrative systems and operational policies. This dedication to internal organization building has helped YMC build a strong foundation for their external work, and create an internal organization that further supports and sustains their staff.

“YMC initiated the development of an organizing model to engage young people of color in media accountability and media policy change. ... Through their media accountability studies and follow-up campaigns, the YMC was able to win concrete, positive concessions from local media outlets.”

7 THE YMC INITIATED THE DEVELOPMENT OF A YOUTH-LED MODEL FOR MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY ORGANIZING

Of the three areas of media work that the YMC identified, media accountability and media policy change work have been the most challenging. The YMC’s original model was to create a council of organizations that would be involved all three areas of their work: media capacity building, strategic media coordination and media accountability organizing. However, most YMC member organizations discovered they do not have the capacity, or the imperative, to engage in YMC-initiated campaigns. Even with these challenges, the YMC initiated the development of an organizing model to engage young people of color in media accountability and media policy change. In the process the YMC also identified the constituency best suited to engage in media accountability organizing.

DEVELOPED A MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY ORGANIZING STRATEGY TO ENGAGE YOUTH ORGANIZERS

The YMC had many challenges in their media accountability organizing, but they also had significant outcomes. Through their media accountability studies and follow-up campaigns, the YMC was able to win concrete, positive concessions from local media outlets.

The YMC’s media accountability studies, in particular, were very successful in building the leadership, capacity and political analysis of their participants. The projects also helped to build credibility among youth organizers. One organizational leader explained, *“It made the Youth Media Council part of the organizing world, not just a trainer.”*



The media accountability studies and campaigns allowed the YMC to experiment with how youth could demand media accountability on the local level. In the first major project, 15 young people who were new to organizing made up the YMC’s Campaign Research Team. The team conducted an action research project on KTVU Channel 2’s news coverage of youth and crime. They published *Speaking for Ourselves*, which led to an accountability session with KTVU Channel 2 and delegation meetings with seven other outlets. The study also led to the YMC’s first youth-journalist roundtable, hosted by KTVU Channel 2 in March 2002, which was attended by 19 youth groups and 15 journalists.

In their second major accountability project, the YMC researched and published *Is KMEL the People’s Station?: A Community Assessment of 106.1 KMEL*. To conduct the study, the YMC set up the Community Coalition for Media Accountability (CCMA) to conduct ongoing organizing. The CCMA was successful in securing two hours of airtime on 106.1 KMEL in response to their demands. Through this forum, youth radio listeners were able to reframe

2002-2003 CCMA
MEMBERS

Let's Get Free
Media Alliance
Mindzeye Artists Collective
HOMEY
Project Yes!



issues of violence and terrorism on one of the Bay Area's major radio stations for the first time (See Case Study: The Campaign to Build a People's Station).

*IDENTIFIED YOUNG ARTISTS AND MEDIAMAKERS AS KEY CONSTITUENCIES
FOR THEIR INITIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY ORGANIZING*

While YMC staff had the skills to conduct media accountability campaigns and media bias represented a real problem for youth organizers, it was a challenge for the YMC to engage their original member organizations in media accountability organizing and balance this work with their media capacity building and strategic communications projects.

Most of the YMC member organizations said they did not have the capacity to engage in YMC-initiated campaigns. They explained that the demands of their own campaigns and constituents prohibited them from participating. Several organizers also expressed that, while media accountability is theoretically important to their communities, it was not close enough to their core issues to make it a priority. For example, one organization recounted their experience in trying to participate in the KMEL accountability campaign:

One of the things that was difficult about the KMEL campaign is we could never make it. We tried, but it really didn't feel urgent. And while there were some connections—hip-hop music, the station everyone was listening to—it felt so distant from what people were actually struggling with and disconnected to the work we were doing. So we began to back away because we didn't want to waste their time.

Through the process of building their media accountability organizing model, the YMC discovered the need to expand their base. Young artists and mediamakers were the more appropriate constituency for media accountability organizing, since they were the people most directly impacted by media outlet policies. With the creation of the Community Coalition for Media Accountability (CCMA) in 2002 and the addition of several new general members, the YMC grew their membership from eight to 15 organizations, representing youth organizing, arts education, cultural and media activist groups.

THE CAMPAIGN TO BUILD A PEOPLE'S STATION

In 2001, Bay Area DJ Davey D approached YMC, asking for help documenting problems with 106.1 KMEL—the self-proclaimed “people’s station.” He had recently been fired from the station, even though he was one of their most popular and community-oriented DJs on air. This was part of a national pattern of station-owner Clear Channel firing local DJs and replacing them with canned programming and hosts. Soon after he was fired, Davey D became a nationally known community media advocate. FCC commissioners approached him and said that in order to change radio policy and content they needed documentation of community concerns about local radio.



San Francisco's 106.1 KMEL is the primary radio station for Bay Area youth and people of color, listened to by more than 600,000 people. In the early 1990s, the station became the leading "urban music" station in the Bay Area due in large part to the pioneering work of local DJs like Davey D. Davey D's innovative programming combined music and talk by integrating music from local hip-hop artists with public affairs programming impacting the hip-hop generation.

After Clear Channel's takeover of the station in 1999 and Davey D's subsequent firing, the number of local artists and progressive voices on KMEL had rapidly declined and community organizers no longer had access to the air. Additionally, youth organizing groups were disturbed by the station's treatment of war and violence issues. At the time, community activists were challenging Oakland's Measure FF, Mayor Jerry Brown's ballot initiative to hire 100 new police officers as a solution to the rise in homicides. Community organizers and criminal justice groups warned that the costly measure was ineffective, unfair and dangerous to youth. The infamous Oakland "Riders" police misconduct trial was still in progress, which put a spotlight on police violence and corruption. Youth organizers wanted funding for community programs and jobs instead of a corrupt police department. However the No on FF campaign and community concerns regarding the police department were never discussed on KMEL.

In Fall 2002, the YMC conducted a one-month content analysis of drive-time KMEL broadcasts, monitoring for youth voices, balanced content and bias toward pro-war and pro-incarceration perspectives. The study confirmed that KMEL routinely excluded voices of youth organizers and local artists and neglected discussion of policy debates affecting youth and people of color. KMEL focused disproportionately on crime and violence, reinforcing the image of young people as dangerous, but did not mention campaigns where young people were seeking real solutions to the problems. Additionally, KMEL had no clear avenues for listeners to hold the station accountable to their needs.

In order to hold KMEL and its parent Clear Channel accountable, the YMC with Mindzey, Media Alliance and Let's Get Free formed the Community Coalition for Media Accountability (CCMA). In its first 14 months, CCMA held two delegation visits with Clear Channel management and several successful events, but sustaining a full campaign was difficult. With the exception of Let's Get Free, the YMC's other members did not have the capacity to participate in YMC-initiated campaigns; media accountability issues fell outside of member organizations' core missions and groups were stretched thin by their own campaigns. YMC staff was also stretched with their other areas of work. After 18 months, the coalition temporarily disbanded in order to reassess their strategy.

Even though the original CCMA was short-lived, it did have two important victories. Through its organizing, the coalition won media access for local youth organizers on KMEL by securing two hours for a live prime-time broadcast to discuss issues of violence and the impact of the "war on terrorism" at home. "360 Degrees of Violence" was hosted by Let's Get Free and attended by more than 200 youth. Additionally, since the campaign drew attention to declining local artists programming, KMEL started a local artist show and regularly plays local artists in their other rotations. Though Clear Channel claims the campaign had nothing to do with this change, industry watchers and journalists credit the CCMA's campaign for this shift.

The experience with CCMA helped the YMC to think deeply about how they could structure and sustain media accountability organizing. They realized that artists and media activists, and not youth organizers, are the primary constituency for this work. They are now in the process of expanding their membership structure to create a pool of artist-organizers who will participate in media accountability campaigns and lead efforts to create a community-based media policy agenda.



CHALLENGES: LESSONS LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

Every social change strategy has its own set of challenges as organizers work to make their visions reality. In their first three years, the YMC has had their share of challenges as they worked to define and build a model for strategic communications and media accountability in the youth organizing movement. The following are the key challenges the YMC faced in their start-up period and the lessons learned as they developed a model for youth engagement in the new field of media justice.

1 THE YMC NEEDS TO CLARIFY AND FOCUS THEIR WORK

The YMC's start-up phase has been very experimental and their staff have built everything from stakeholder investment in the work, to the on-the-ground capacity of youth organizations, to the media justice field itself. Along the way they have struggled to balance their desire to be comprehensive in their vision while deepening their practice. It's no surprise that the YMC has been spread thin while playing several important roles in the movement. Several themes emerged through staff and member interviews, including the need for the YMC to clarify the expectations and benefits of membership, the issue areas they prioritize and their organizational strategy.

CLARIFY THE EXPECTATIONS AND BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

For the most part, YMC member organizations understand and support the organization's need to experiment. Several saw strength in the YMC's willingness to learn and change their methodology. Still, because the work has been in a state of continuous evolution, member groups have been confused about the focus of the organization and the expectations and benefits of membership. An organizer from Let's Get Free shared:

It hasn't been clear if being part of the YMC means that you get services or if you are part of some Bay Area-wide leadership group on media issues or if it means being part of a campaigning organization. They need to be clear about what the focus is, what the commitment is and what you see from that commitment.

Groups generally defined their membership in the YMC by their level of involvement. On one end were groups that just wanted to receive YMC services and training. At the other end were groups wanting and able to participate in YMC planning and coordinated media strategy. Some expressed concern that the YMC is understaffed and were reluctant to call when they needed help because staff seemed so busy.



CLARIFY THE ISSUE AREAS THE YMC PRIORITIZES

In addition to the complexity of the work itself, the complexity of the youth movement has been a challenge. The youth movement is diverse and multi-issue. YMC groups are working on a broad spectrum of racial justice and social justice issues: education justice, juvenile justice, gender equity, environmental justice, economic justice, war and immigration. The YMC found that in order to meet their goal of promoting a racial justice agenda by amplifying a progressive youth voice, their staff and membership must be able to speak as experts on these issues. Addressing this reality may mean they need to choose one or two issue areas to focus on.

FOCUS ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

The challenges identified by member groups mirror some of the challenges for the organization. While strategic communications and media accountability organizing are necessary and essential to the success of youth organizing, no one intermediary can do it all. As the YMC moves beyond their start-up phase, they need to take the lessons of their first three years to solidify and clarify their methodology, tools and membership structure. Additionally, they may need to make some hard decisions about how to focus their work, given their capacity and resources.

“Coalition-based campaigns, such as Stop the Superjail and No on FF, were the most successful in using media strategy to influence media and decisionmakers, but also the hardest to develop ... Without movement infrastructure to develop campaign strategy and sustain coalitions, coordinated work became difficult to maintain among youth organizations.”

2 THE YMC'S WORK DEPENDS ON, AND IS LIMITED BY, THE CAPACITY OF THE YOUTH MOVEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONS

The YMC's model is designed to build on the capacity of youth organizations and the broader youth movement. However, this interdependence also creates challenges for the YMC. Changes in the political climate, varying capacity within youth organizations and gaps in the capacity of the broader youth movement mean that the YMC needs to continually reassess their strategies to accomplish their mission.

A CHANGING POLITICAL CLIMATE

It's a very different climate in the youth movement than four to five years ago. As the nature and philosophy of organizing changes in the Bay Area, the YMC is going to have to stay tuned to what that means. —YMC member, Center for Young Women's Development

The YMC's model depends on existing movement capacity and there have been important changes in the youth movement since the YMC started in 2001. When the YMC was launched, many vital organizations of the Bay Area youth movement were responding to the Proposition 21 ballot initiative. After September 11, 2001, there have been major shifts in the political climate and funding. Key networks and youth movement intermediaries such as Youth Force Coalition and the Youth Empowerment Center, as well as several youth organizing groups such as C-Beyond, have had to shut their doors. In general, organizing has become more difficult as the policy arena has become less accessible, the public debate has narrowed, and corporate media has been deregulated. YMC staff commented:

The harder it is to organize on the ground, the harder it is for communications to happen. And so we were really relying on building communications capacity through strong campaigns over the last year, but then seeing that fewer and fewer of our groups were running traditional campaigns.

CAMPAIGN CAPACITY VARIES GREATLY AMONG YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations have stronger capacity to do successful media work when they have strong capacity to plan and execute campaigns and work in coalition with others. However, this capacity varies greatly across and within youth organizations at any given time. Many youth organizations need to balance organizing with youth leadership development and they are not always able to carry out high-level campaigns. This is challenging for the YMC model, since it relies on groups having their own campaigns and the capacity to participate in campaign-based media strategy and coalition work. Furthermore, organizations often need tailored support, which can be difficult for intermediaries to provide.

CAPACITY GAPS IN THE YOUTH ORGANIZING MOVEMENT

Coalition-based campaigns, such as Stop the Superjail and No on FF, were the most successful in using media strategy to influence media and decisionmakers, but also the hardest to develop. This partly reflects the shifting capacity of individual organizations, and partly reflects limited movement-level capacity. Without movement infrastructure to develop campaign strategy and sustain coalitions, coordinated work became difficult to maintain among youth organizations.

Recognizing gaps in the movement, the YMC began to provide their members with support for coalition building and campaign development as well as media strategy. For obvious



reasons this has been difficult because it is more work than any one organization can take on. Most organizations need both movement-building support to develop and deepen their work with each other, as well as communications support to maintain and deepen relationships with media. The YMC needs to assess the current conditions and refine their role given this changing context. They may also need to make recommendations for funding and building new institutions that complement their work. Additionally, they may also want to direct their own strategic communications work around hot issue areas, collaborating with youth organizing groups as spokespeople but not relying exclusively on coalition-campaigns to drive the work.

3 INSTITUTIONAL MEDIA BIAS CREATES PARTICULAR CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH ORGANIZERS

The corporate culture of news outlets, bias towards young people as news sources, and inaccessibility of newsrooms makes strategic communications and media accountability work essential but difficult.

THE CORPORATE CULTURE OF NEWS

News institutions are generally inaccessible to young people and corporate ownership exaggerates this. While young people are seen as consumers of entertainment media, they are generally not seen as a demographic that consumes news. This can limit young people's influence over news stories. As one organizer put it:

What leverage do 15 to 20-year-old youth of color in Oakland have around how KTVU operates, or now how CYA [California Youth Authority] operates? Because it's not like

Channel 2 is chasing that demographic. The advertisers don't care about them, so why should Channel 2?

In order to challenge the images and representation of young people and their issues, youth organizers also have to address the broader issue of news outlets' focus on sensational stories. This requires the youth organizing sector to not only develop a strategic communications strategy, but also a strategy for institutional change in the media.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOT SEEN AS CREDIBLE SOURCES

Media bias also means that journalists do not see young people as credible sources. Youth organizers interviewed said that while it is difficult enough to place good stories, it is even more challenging to make the media shift how it reports on youth, communities of color and immigrants. Some organizers said this could lead young people to censor themselves in their media work:

Youth organizations especially feel disempowered by the media and some of those assumptions lead people to disempower themselves. For example: assuming that a reporter wouldn't be interested in covering an issue or assuming that if you don't like the coverage of a campaign there is nothing you can do to communicate that to the journalist.

In order to shift journalists' bias against youth sources, the YMC has worked to develop its reputation as an organization that develops and centralizes credible youth spokespeople.

INACCESSIBILITY OF NEWSROOMS

YMC staff and members also talked about the general inaccessibility of newsrooms. YMC staff said that while it is possible for youth organizations to access media and influence the debate around a particular story, or even their particular campaigns, this is only half the battle. In order for media to shift the way it represents young people of color and the issues they are organizing around, there needs to be shift in the way newsrooms operate. Newsrooms need to become more accessible to communities and young people in order for their overall policies, priorities and content to shift. For this reason the YMC is considering developing strategies for youth to influence media outlets from the inside out, as well as from the outside in.

Members commented that reporters and editors need to be trained to do better reporting on youth at the same time youth organizations are learning how to work with the media. The YMC is considering different ways to address this issue, such as developing a Young Voices Speakers' Bureau of youth movement media leaders. This group will not only use media events to help youth organizations get coverage, but will set up editorial meetings to educate editors on their issues and advocate for strategies to change news coverage.

4 *MOST YOUTH ORGANIZING GROUPS DO NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO TAKE ON MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY ORGANIZING*

During their first three years, the YMC learned that most youth organizing groups do not generally have the time, mandate or capacity to participate in media accountability organizing. On the whole, youth organizations struggle to meet their own youth development, base building and campaign organizing goals framed by their own missions. While most youth organizations agreed that organizing for media accountability is important, they were clear that neither their organization nor their members had the time or energy to participate in these campaigns. This presents a challenge to the YMC, because their model was built on having the same constituency—youth organizers—drive all three areas of work: strategic

communications, media coordination and media accountability. Without having a clear base for their media accountability organizing, the YMC has had to reassess this approach.

5 YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS AND MEDIA OUTLETS, BY THEIR NATURE, HAVE HIGH TURNOVER

Turnover is a major issue for building and sustaining media capacity over time. Youth organizations and media outlets' are both challenged by high turnover rates.

TURNOVER IN YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

Youth organizations have high turnover rates by their nature. As young people grow up, develop other interests, deal with the pressures of school and work, they transition in and out of grassroots organizations. Given this reality, it has been challenging for the YMC to sustain and build capacity in individual organizations from year to year. One YMC staff member explained:

After working for a whole year with a dedicated group of people who are specifically doing media work, the challenge became passing on those skills to the rest of the membership. At this point I'm not even sure if any of the young people who are part of that media committee will be there again next year. And, the two staff members who were the coordinators of the committee are extremely overworked and one may not be there next year.

To some degree the issue of turnover is less of an issue for the youth movement as a whole, because young people and leaders move between organizations and projects. However, the capacity of individual organizations impacts the larger movement. Because the membership and leadership of organizations are constantly changing, there needs to be some way to retain the collective memory for the next generation of organizers. They YMC can address this by centralizing media resources for youth organizing groups, increasing the number of young leaders with media advocacy and accountability skills by creating training for trainers, and documenting YMC tools and methodologies.

TURNOVER IN MEDIA OUTLETS

Similarly, because of increasing market pressures, media outlets often rely on interns and temporary reporters, which means the turnover in media outlets is at an all-time high. This makes it hard for the YMC, and even harder for youth organizations, to maintain relationships with journalists from year to year. This is particularly true in an era of staff downsizing within mainstream outlets. To address this challenge the YMC is going to shift their focus to developing relationships with editors instead of reporters, because they have more influence and stability, and to following individual reporters as they move from outlet to outlet.

6 STRATEGIC MEDIA COORDINATION TAKES TIME AND RESOURCES

The YMC designed their Council to be inclusive and participatory, with avenues for member groups to actively shape the structure and priorities of the organization. However, building such a model can be challenging. The model is fundamentally rooted in a commitment to movement building and its development has required experimentation and ongoing revisions.

“Because the membership and leadership of organizations are constantly changing, there needs to be some way to retain the collective memory for the next generation of organizers.”

EXPERIMENTATION WITH THE MODEL

To make this model work, the YMC had to invest a great degree of time and resources to lay the foundation for their higher-level work. This included building trust, developing basic capacity and strengthening relationships with individual members. The YMC also had to experiment with the best model to support member participation. Originally, Council meetings were every month and they attempted to address every area of media work. At least six YMC member organizations felt there was a need to clarify and narrow the role and purpose of the Council.

REFLECTION AND REVISION

When YMC staff realized this approach was not sustainable, they experimented with separating the political education and planning into two annual Council retreats. Six of the eight YMC members said they appreciated this new structure and the opportunity to influence the YMC's direction as an organization. Representatives of six groups said the retreats helped to strengthen their relationships with YMC staff and other organizations in the youth movement. Four specifically said these retreats have played an important role in aligning their thinking. Y-MAC noted that:

I think the retreats have been a highlight. The big picture thinking that happened was really key. At the last one we did some work around the history of the Right's control of the media. It was deep and really informed people's consciousness.



CONTINUING TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF MEMBERS

Even with these revisions, some organizations found it is still hard to prioritize time to participate, given the immediate needs of their own members. One organization found the time commitment too intensive given the demands of their campaign work. For another, the movement-level work of the YMC can seem abstract to their members when compared to the street-level organizing work they do every day. An organizational leader from AIWA commented that the strategy sessions were often dense, and that more thought should go into whether youth members participate, or whether retreats focus on organizational leaders and staff. She recommended that strategy sessions include organizational leaders, and if youth attend they should be given advance materials and support:

If youth members attend these strategy sessions, they should act as delegates, and bring the ideas of the other youth organizers from their group, and not just their own opinions.

As the YMC moves forward, they will need to assess the needs of their members and structures to best sustain their participation. Ultimately, this challenge is inherent to the participatory nature of the YMC's membership model.

7 CURRENTLY, THERE ARE TOO FEW RESOURCES FOR THE WORK DEFINED

The YMC has developed an ambitious agenda and there are not enough resources in the organization or the movement to do the work as the YMC originally envisioned it. Deep media capacity building, strategic media coordination, media accountability organizing and policy advocacy can all be resource intensive. As the YMC tries to address these different needs, they may need to redesign and refine their program to be more efficient, as well as secure strategic partners and more resources for the field to realize their vision. Whatever direction they go, the trick will be maintaining the quality and depth of their media capacity building work while extending their reach and impact.



RESIST
RACIST
RADIO

PROFIT
HATE
RADIO

THE ROAD AHEAD: IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDERS AND THE YMC

The YMC has played a major leadership role in the emerging media justice movement. Not only has the YMC helped to distinguish media justice from media reform, they have also been instrumental in defining what media justice looks like on the ground through the youth organizing movement. As the YMC continues this work, they will need to sharpen their model by applying the lessons learned through their challenges and success. The following are implications for the funding community and for the YMC based on the lessons learned from their first three years.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDERS

1. INVEST IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE YOUTH ORGANIZING SECTOR

Strategic communications has proven a successful strategy for youth organizers to develop deeper analysis, build stronger campaigns and harness power. In fact, it is critical for youth organizers to enter the public debate and influence decisionmakers. Lack of investment in media work significantly diminishes the power of the youth organizing movement. To realize the full potential of the youth organizing sector, more resources are needed to support media capacity building, strategic communications and coordination among youth organizing groups. Youth organizing, youth development and racial justice funders seeking greater impact should consider ways to leverage more resources to support this work.

2. INVEST IN BUILDING ORGANIZATIONS WITH THE CAPACITY TO DO MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY ORGANIZING

In order to successfully impact the public debate, youth organizers need media outlets, policy and infrastructure that are fair, accurate and accountable to their communities. However, most youth organizing groups are working at or beyond capacity on their own campaigns. In order to increase the effectiveness of the youth movement and individual youth organizations, youth organizing, youth development and racial justice funders should invest in organizations that have the capacity to do media accountability organizing without relying on existing youth organizing groups. This strategy will enable the youth organizing community to engage new constituents such as young artists and mediamakers to do the work.

“Over the past three years, the YMC has built credibility and influence within media outlets and has also established their organization as a media watchdog and organizing group. In practice, the YMC has found these interlocking ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ roles to be essential to changing the dynamics of media enough for marginalized groups to influence public debate.”

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE YMC

1. MAKE TOUGH CHOICES ON PROGRAM STRATEGY TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT

Staffing, resource constraints and capacity issues require the YMC to refine their analysis and make tough choices about their program strategy. The YMC has developed a sophisticated and holistic model. However, it is doubtful that an organization with their staff size and capacity can successfully play all three roles they have laid out: media capacity building intermediary, media watchdog organizer, and alliance-builder.

The YMC will need to either choose one primary role and help find and develop other partners who can play other roles, or redesign their program to use their resources more efficiently. Whatever their approach, the YMC will need to focus their energy and roles enough to be effective. This may mean hard choices given the interlocking nature of each area of YMC’s work, and the great need for support in each area.

2. UTILIZE “INSIDER” AS WELL AS “OUTSIDER” STRATEGIES TO INFLUENCE CONTENT AND OUTLET ACCOUNTABILITY

Over the past three years, the YMC has built credibility and influence within media outlets and has also established their organization as a media watchdog and organizing group. In practice, the YMC has found these interlocking “insider” and “outsider” roles to be essential to changing the dynamics of media enough for marginalized groups to influence public debate. One YMC staff member elaborated:

When you are already far on the fringes, having an outsider access strategy is only going to get you so far. One of the major lessons I learned was access for marginalized groups is only half of the issue. Some structural changes need to happen in order for us to achieve our goals. Maybe we need some insider strategy, to get more room in the news for these kinds of stories to come in, as well as an outsider advocacy strategy of packaging everything perfectly to get access.

As the YMC refines their programs and strategy, they should continue to balance their “insider” relationship-building strategies with media outlets and journalists and their “outsider” media accountability strategies.

3. IDENTIFY COALITION-BASED CAMPAIGNS TO STRENGTHEN WITH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

As opportunities arise, the YMC should identify strong coalition-based campaigns that emerge in the youth movement and strengthen them with strategic communications support. Strong coalitions have the potential to influence the public debate and policy around key racial justice and youth issues. They also provide an arena for youth organizers to develop media expertise preparing them to be leaders in media strategy over time. While the YMC is not in a position to generate new coalitions, it can take advantage of those that emerge in the movement itself.

4. CONTINUE TO BROKER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUTH AND JOURNALISTS

The YMC’s emerging role as a broker of relationships between youth and journalists is powerful. The YMC should continue to sharpen and develop this role in order to coordinate youth spokespeople and influence the debate around key issues locally and nationally.



5. REORGANIZE AND REFINE THE YMC MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE TO SUSTAIN GROUPS' PARTICIPATION

Based on the experience they have gained over the last three years, the YMC should reorganize and refine their membership structure. As described in the challenges section, many YMC members define their membership by their level of activity. The YMC should consider creating a membership structure that allows for different levels of commitment and benefits based on the capacity of their member organizations. A member from Let's Get Free offered the following idea:

I could see different types of membership with different levels of commitment and activity. If you join at the lowest level, you get training from them and you will be invited to different events. Or you can be a lead member and be a part of the YMC planning and strategy sessions and media accountability training.

This structure could also allow the YMC to experiment with new models with their most committed group of members. For example, this group might play a role in doing strategic media work or acting as movement spokespeople for YMC-coordinated media opportunities.

Many member groups appreciated the assessment interviews that the YMC conducted with their organizations at the end of year three, because they helped members articulate their needs and capacity, and helped the YMC clarify their plans and services. In order to guide their membership structure, the YMC needs to continue developing their assessment tools for members to determine what capacity they currently have, the best way to use media given the work they are doing and the best use of YMC support/membership.

6. STRENGTHEN MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY ORGANIZING BY ENGAGING A BASE OUTSIDE OF CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

While staff and YMC members would like their media accountability campaigns to have even deeper impacts on media policy and outlets, they have taken the first steps to show that holding media outlets accountable is possible. The next step is for the YMC to figure out who the right partners are and what level of accountability they are trying to achieve. To this end, the YMC has already started to restructure its membership so that it has a new base of youth arts and media organizations who will participate in its accountability campaigns. This will complement their current membership of youth organizing groups who will continue to focus on strategic communications work.

“By taking the time to reflect and refine their priorities and methodology, the YMC has the opportunity to strengthen their work and build a model that advances media justice and youth empowerment.”

7. DEVELOP STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO STRENGTHEN THE OVERALL LEADERSHIP OF THE YOUTH AND MEDIA REFORM MOVEMENTS

The YMC has played an important and unique leadership role in the youth and media reform movements. As the YMC continues to play this role, they need to be careful not to take on responsibilities outside their unique niche. The YMC’s national partnerships have been stronger than their local partnerships. On the local level, the YMC began to fill a gap and provide organizing strategy support when the Youth Force Coalition shut down. On the national level, the YMC has some strong partners and allies, but in its nature field building at this level can take people away from the ground-level work. Developing and maintaining strategic movement-building partners that can play complementary roles is important for YMC success and sustainability. In particular, the YMC should clarify their constituency and base, deepen and formalize relationships with other local intermediaries who provide complementary support to the youth movement, and engage their national partners in ways that strengthen local work.

8. DOCUMENT AND REFINE THE YMC’S METHODOLOGY TO EXPAND REACH

In order to build from the lessons of their first three years and expand their reach, the YMC needs to take the time to tighten, focus and document their methodology. Specifically, the YMC needs to find creative strategies for providing deep media capacity building to groups without exhausting YMC resources. In addition to formalizing their curriculum and tools, the YMC should consider developing training for trainers and a pool of associate trainers. This would enable them to continue building the skills of those they have worked with in the past and extend the YMC’s influence. This might also be a strategy for media accountability work, through developing a team of media accountability organizers and/or training a network of leaders to do media accountability work in their issue areas and at different levels.

9. ENGAGE IN A STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS TO BUILD ON THE LESSONS AND BEST PRACTICES OF THE FIRST THREE YEARS

The YMC has many decisions to make regarding their future direction. Based on the lessons learned and questions raised from the first three years of work, the YMC should engage in a strategic planning process. This process could help the YMC prioritize their strategic goals, sharpen and hone their programs and methodology, reorganize their membership structure, and identify key strategic partners locally and nationally. By taking the time to reflect and refine their priorities and methodology, the YMC has the opportunity to strengthen their work and build a model that advances media justice and youth empowerment.

YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL MEMBER PROFILES

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA)

Youth Build Immigrant Power Project (YBIP) is a project of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, created in 1997 to develop the leadership and organizing skills of youth from low-income Asian immigrant families to work on a range of issues – from fighting against sweatshop conditions, to ensuring a voice for the immigrant community in Oakland.

Asian Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health (APIRH)

APIRH (now Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice) is a social, political and economic justice organization working for the liberation of Asian women and girls through the lens of reproductive justice. We play a pioneering role in defining a progressive women's reproductive rights agenda through our grassroots and advocacy work.

Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL)

With six neighborhood-based sites in Oakland, AYPAL aims to change the relationship of power between young people and policymakers through youth-identified and youth-run direct action organizing and arts activist campaigns for school reform and community improvement.

C-Beyond

C-Beyond exists to develop youth leaders who realize their individual and collective power to organize and create unity for the good of all people. We educate youth of color, low-income youth, young women, disabled youth, and lgbtq youth in Concord and Bay Point/Pittsburg, California. Closed 2004.

Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD)

Our mission is to empower and inspire young women who have been involved with the juvenile justice system and/or the underground street economy to create positive change in their lives and communities.

Let's Get Free (LGF)

Formed in 1998 as an independent youth organization, Let's Get Free is now the youth organizing project of Books Not Bars. LGF is one of the leading groups in the vibrant San Francisco Bay Area youth and student movement working on criminal and juvenile justice issues.

PUEBLO's Youth of Oakland United (YOU)

People United for a Better Oakland is a multi-ethnic, multi-issue community membership organization. Through its organizing and Youth of Oakland United programs PUEBLO uses organizing, direct action, policy research and analysis, leadership development, popular education and coalition building to confront the issues that affect the lives of our membership.

Young Workers United (YWU)

The mission of Young Workers United is to increase access for young people in San Francisco to quality education and employment by organizing youth as workers, students and consumers to hold corporations and policymakers accountable, and to unite the youth and labor movements to raise standards in non-union, low-wage jobs.

Youth Force Coalition (YFC)

Youth Force Coalition is a coalition of youth organizations fighting against the oppressive attacks on our communities. YFC builds youth leadership and strategic unity among diverse constituencies, creates collective strategy, mobilizes young people and wages campaigns against the system to build a movement for social change and a just world. Disbanded 2004.

Youth Making A Change (Y-MAC) at Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth

Since 1991, Y-MAC has been a dynamic, multi-ethnic, youth-led organization that builds the leadership and power of high school age low-income young people and people of color in San Francisco. Through peer education, citywide cultural events, direct action, advocacy and an intensive leadership development process, Y-MAC is training a new generation of grassroots leaders to create a more just, democratic society.

Youth United for Community Action (YUCA)

Youth United for Community Action is a grassroots community organization created, led and run by young people of color from low-income communities that provides a safe space for young people to empower ourselves and work on environmental and social justice issues to establish positive systemic change through grassroots community organizing.

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YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL STAFF, 2001-PRESENT. CLOCKWISE, LEFT TO RIGHT: YU TONG, TAISHI DUCHICELA, JEN SORIANO, AMY SONNIE, DAVID KAHN, AIMEE SUZARA, RISHI AWATRAMANI AND MALKIA CYRIL. NOT PICTURED: ANDY DURAN, MONICA LY, VENUS RODRIGUEZ, NAT SMITH AND ARYEETAY WELBECK.