

SEATTLE CREATIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

A proposal to the City of Seattle and other investors to support this new initiative.

Collectively prepared by the SCYDN Task Force

INTRODUCTION:

The Seattle Creative Youth Development Network (SCYDN) emerged from a collaborative effort led by TeenTix and The Seattle Office of Arts and Culture. Throughout 2024, with funding from The Seattle Office of Arts and Culture, we have focused on establishing a strong foundation for this network. This work included convening a task force of seasoned stakeholders with deep historical knowledge of Seattle’s Creative Youth Development (CYD) ecosystem alongside current youth development leaders actively practicing in the field.

Over the course of 12 months, we conducted extensive research, engaged with existing youth worker networks nationwide, issued a survey to local youth workers and arts administrators, and held six task force meetings to reflect on key findings. These discussions examined the state of CYD work, the unique needs of our community, the potential impact of a dedicated support network, and the collective priorities of youth workers navigating evolving challenges in the field.

Seattle’s youth face significant barriers to thriving, compounded by a growing budget gap threatening arts programming and a nationwide youth mental health crisis. These challenges disproportionately impact marginalized youth, who often face limited access to resources and pathways into creative careers. SCYDN aims to address these pressing issues by fostering a network where youth workers are equipped to provide equitable access to creativity, mentorship, and professional opportunities for young people in our city.

SCYDN also serves as a vital professional development resource for those providing creative services to Seattle youth. The network emphasizes best practices such as boundary setting, self-care, and navigating difficult conversations to prevent premature burnout among youth workers. Supporting youth workers is essential to the long-term health and success of youth programming, as it ensures high program quality, safety, and consistency for participants.

Nonprofit arts organizations are under significant financial strain while striving to sustain youth programming, placing stress on program and administrative staff alike. SCYDN offers a targeted support system that goes beyond capacity-building grants or professional development conferences. Our approach specifically centers creative youth development workers as essential to the health of the entire CYD ecosystem. By providing a compensated space for workers to share resources, reflect on best practices, and build community, SCYDN helps prevent the scarcity mindset often imposed by underfunded environments.

This focus on supporting the workers benefits the organizations they represent and, in turn, the youth they serve. Young people need caring, well-supported mentors and role models to thrive.

SCYDN positions itself as an essential intervention at a pivotal time, emphasizing that centering the needs of CYD workers will positively impact the entire ecosystem.

The field of CYD continues to evolve, yet much of the learning around legal compliance, best practices, and appropriate boundaries still occurs in isolated silos. Seattle has been a national leader in creative youth work for decades, but our hesitation to avoid adultist practices has sometimes led to a lack of structural guardrails. SCYDN acknowledges this tension and aims to create a space where youth workers can balance supportive mentorship with essential operational and ethical considerations.

Youth work, particularly in the arts, involves holding space for young people's challenges, stress, and trauma. Without sustained support for workers, this can contribute to high turnover and emotional fatigue. While SCYDN cannot resolve poor working conditions within organizations, it can provide critical tools, resources, and shared knowledge to mitigate burnout rooted in insufficient professional support.

The challenges facing youth and youth workers are dynamic, shifting daily, especially in the continued aftermath of the pandemic. SCYDN aims to create an environment where ongoing dialogue, reflection, and proactive learning ensure youth workers remain adaptable and supported as they serve our community.

This document outlines the framework for SCYDN's continued development, offering a foundation for sustainable growth and lasting impact on the CYD ecosystem.

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LEVEL SETTING

SHARED DEFINITIONS

SCYDN - Seattle Creative Youth Development Network

A title for this proposed network.

CYD - Creative Youth Development

Creative Youth Development (CYD) is a commitment to supporting young people's stories, ideas, and dreams through creative expression and honoring their lived experience. In order to create environments that promote Creative Youth Development, these three concepts must be present: Racial Equity and Social Justice, Youth Voices, Collective Action.

➤ [*Definition developed by the Creative Youth Development National Partnership*](#)

Youth Worker:

A youth worker is a creative professional dedicated to supporting young people's growth, creativity, and well-being through meaningful engagement with the arts, culture, and community. These individuals play pivotal roles in fostering youth empowerment by blending creative practices with mentorship, education, and advocacy.

Creative youth development (CYD) workers are at the heart of this definition and include teaching artists, culture bearers, programming staff at nonprofit cultural organizations, and professionals in social services and creative industries. These roles intersect with broader categories of support, such as social workers, mutual aid workers, industry mentors, and nonprofit professionals, highlighting the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of this work.

Youth workers address both personal and systemic challenges young people face, creating spaces that nurture creative expression while promoting equity, well-being, and collective growth.

WHO WE ARE

SCYDN Task Force members represent a diverse group of individuals, selected through a structured process designed to ensure inclusivity and relevance to the Creative Youth Development (CYD) mission, emphasizing diversity in lived experiences, demographics, and professional backgrounds, focusing on individuals with significant experience in youth programming.

Task Force Members

Antonesha Jackson – Arts Corps
Carina del Rosario – ArtsWA
Cat Martin – Paul G. Allen/Vulcan
Cecelia DeLeon – Youth Advocate/Youth Worker
Elaine Simons – Youth Advocate/Youth Worker

Meilani Mandery – Wing Luke
Nancy Chang – Beyond Base Advisor / Youth Advocate
Rayna Mathis – Seattle Public Schools/Earshot Jazz
Reese Tanimura – Northwest Folklife
Shana Bestock – ACT Theatre/Penguin Productions
Simona Zappas – Gates Foundation

City of Seattle Task Force Advocates & Administrators

Ashraf Hasham - The Seattle Office of Arts and Culture
Kristi Woo - The Seattle Office of Arts and Culture
Monique Courcy - TeenTix
Tina La Padula - The Seattle Office of Arts and Culture

THE CHALLENGES

OUR ASSUMPTIONS, RESEARCH AND KEY FINDINGS

Our Assumption

If creative youth development workers are supported within a healing-centered network, they will be better equipped to foster environments where young people can thrive creatively.

Our Research Shows Us

Extensive research, including interviews with five CYD networks across the country and insights from local partner ArtsWA, has revealed critical factors that shape the success and sustainability of youth worker networks. These findings underscore the challenges and opportunities ahead as we build the SCYDN.

Interviews with Existing Youth Networks

Network Development and Public Sector Connections: CYD networks often begin as informal gatherings of organizations providing arts and support services. Over time, they evolve to include a diverse range of stakeholders, such as teaching artists, mental health professionals, researchers, and community advocates. The relationship between youth networks and the public sector varies significantly:

- Some networks have formed independent structures, such as 501(c)(3) nonprofits or partnerships with philanthropic foundations, to mitigate political barriers and maintain autonomy.
- Others align closely with city programs and officials, leveraging these connections to advocate for funding and support while amplifying their capacity to implement initiatives.
 - **Recommendation:** *SCYDN must assess the benefits and challenges of both approaches, using input from the Task Force to navigate its relationship with public entities and ensure long-term sustainability.*

Youth Involvement Models: Youth engagement is a cornerstone of effective CYD networks, but approaches vary widely:

- **Advisory Councils and Gatherings:** Networks frequently utilize advisory councils or conferences to integrate youth perspectives into decision-making processes.
- **Balancing Youth Leadership:** While some networks attempt full youth leadership in programming and governance, others recognize that communities often require additional preparation, resources, and training to support these roles effectively.
- **Youth in Grantmaking:** Innovative approaches include engaging youth as grantmakers and recipients, offering a dual role in shaping and benefiting from funding.
- **Focus on Practitioners:** Some networks, like CLE, emphasize supporting practitioners who work with youth, believing that improving practitioners' experiences leads to better outcomes for young people.

- **Recommendation:** *SCYDN should serve as a hub for integrating input from existing youth leadership groups in Seattle, avoiding duplication of efforts and fostering collaboration. By amplifying youth voices across these groups, the network can create a cohesive and impactful platform for shared decision-making.*

Funding Challenges and Opportunities: Sustaining a youth network requires thoughtful funding strategies that address both operational and programmatic needs. Common challenges include funders' preference for direct youth programs over infrastructure, as well as limited local investment in CYD-specific initiatives. Key funding insights include:

- Aligning CYD efforts with broader funding categories, such as youth organizing, prevention, safety, wellness, and health, to access diverse funding streams.
- Advocating for multi-year investments to ensure the network's long-term viability and growth.
 - **Recommendation:** *SCYDN should articulate a compelling case for the unique value of CYD networks and explore partnerships with funders to secure sustainable support.*

Survey Data

A survey was sent Via SurveyMonkey to the following audiences during summer 2024, TeenTix Partner Roster (150+orgs), Youth Arts Grantee recipient list, and the Creative Advantage contact list.

We were able to collect 34 responses - 100% completion with each response. Out of 34 responses, all were fully completed, indicating strong engagement. There was high interest in establishing this type of network within our community. While 50% of respondents had prior knowledge of similar networks, some confusion arose regarding whether the network is designed for youth or youth workers. However, most respondents expressed a shared interest in investing in a network that supports youth workers as a means to better serve the youth in our community.

“The lack of resources in education is challenging for the youth worker community. However, we all have the same goal of supporting youths. By pooling thoughts, ideas, challenges to overcome and goals, a collective can share resources, support and practical solutions. Also, youth workers and organizations can learn about one another's strengths and needs, creating opportunities for mutual support. Finding partnerships within or through such a collaboration can be hugely beneficial as well.” - Survey Respondent, 2024

OUR PROPOSED SOLUTION

WHAT WE DO:

The goal of SCYDN is to unite and care for the diverse tapestry of youth workers, including teaching artists, and advocates and more across our city. By ensuring that Creative Youth Development workers are supported within a healing-centered network, they will be better equipped to create environments where young people can flourish creatively, and receive support when youth bring up sticky situations to ensure that difficult conversations can be had with grace and does not lead to inappropriate or harmful outcomes. This holistic approach not only enhances the well-being of CYD workers but also positively impacts the youth they serve, fostering a cycle of mutual growth and empowerment. Secondary benefits intersects with creating a robust pipeline of both youth development professionals, and creative industries for Seattle's healthy creative ecosystem.

SCYDN is a collaborative network solution to support Seattle's local youth workers and advocates. The need for the Seattle Creative Youth Development Network (SCYDN) has never been more urgent. Seattle's youth face unprecedented challenges, including a growing mental health crisis, systemic budget cuts to arts programming, and ongoing threats to public education and community structures. Nationally, similar networks have launched in response to these pressures, recognizing the critical role creative development plays in building resilience among young people. Without dedicated support, youth workers are left without the resources they need to effectively mentor and inspire the next generation. Census data shows that Seattle's under 30 population is increasing significantly, emphasizing the importance of targeted youth and young adult services. The 2020 Census counts about 14.5% of our total population under the age of 18, and as of the 2014-2018 census comparison period, three-quarters of Seattle residents were adults between 18 and 64 years of age, with an especially high and growing concentration of young adults ages 25 to 34.

The arts provide a powerful space for young people to process, grow, and find community amid today's complex realities. If SCYDN isn't funded, we risk losing a vital support system for both the workers and the youth they serve, leaving them more vulnerable to the mounting pressures of today's chaotic landscape.

We draw inspiration from the proven success of similar learning exchange networks across the country, striving to catalyze racial equity, access, and quality within Seattle's youth-focused ecosystem.

Together, We Strive To:

- Create a vibrant community where frontline staff can gather, ideate, and collaborate.
- Overcome common challenges by creating and sharing systems and tools.
- Build an intentional pathway through ARTS to advocates and partners from the City's multiple departments.

- Cultivate a city-wide movement that transcends individual capacities, fostering a resilient and supportive Seattle Creative Youth Development Network.

What we hope to foster within this network:

- **Network of Peers:** Youth workers, teaching artists, and advocates
- **Learning Opportunities:** Information exchange as well as opportunities for facilitated trainings and workshops
- **Collaboration and Exchange:** Supporting and building from other’s successes, finding shared initiatives and building capacity by developing shared resources

We envision a space that:

- Supports healing-centered care, offering professional development and shared resources for addressing both youth and adult trauma.
- Allows youth workers to openly discuss challenges, share experiences, and collaborate on solutions.

Inputs

- **Resources:** Funding, intentional outreach, training materials, expert consultants, and technology.
- **Support Systems:** Healing-centered training, peer support groups, and mentorship programs.

Outputs

- **Trained Workers:** Increased number of CYD workers trained in healing-centered practices.
- **Healthy Youth:** Increased number of youth experiencing and participating in a vibrant community
- **Support Groups:** Formation of peer support groups.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Implementation of mentorship programs.
- **Resources:** Distribution of healing-centered resources.

Beyond the launch of SCYDN, we are inspired by future opportunities to leverage this network’s passion, drive, and expertise to advocate for the needs of the youth, youth workers, and the organizations that have come together to support them through opportunities such as policy changes, educational practices, and funding.

VALUES

When young people are struggling to connect & find resources they need - youth workers are here for them. This work is challenging, requires commitment, emotional labor, and dedication

from youth workers. To ensure our community's youth workers remain actively engaged in their work, it's critical to also build a community that supports them. We believe this should center both individual and collective wellness and believe we can accomplish this through the development of a new network.

Facilitation & Culture

To foster an inclusive and responsive culture, we need:

- Skilled facilitators who are knowledgeable, empathetic, and can balance accountability with compassion.
- Flexible conversation options that honor individual agency and approach everything that is culturally responsive to the participants present and the identities of the facilitators.
- Acknowledgment of historical influences that shape current challenges, with a commitment to a “journey-based” approach to healing.
- Community and youth input will guide the identification of core issues and the selection of those best suited to lead this healing work, ensuring we approach these challenges with fresh perspectives.

Our Core Values:

- **Collaboration:** We believe in the power of unified efforts, breaking down silos to create a dynamic network of youth workers and organizations. Empower frontline staff to discuss challenges, share ideas, and collaboratively support the youth of today.
- **Equity:** We are committed to advancing racial equity, ensuring inclusivity, compensation for time and energy, and centering BIPOC leadership and participation in all facets of our collective work.
- **Innovation:** We embrace creativity and forward-thinking approaches to address the evolving needs of youth in our community and sharing best practices as they evolve

Our Guiding Principles:

- **Collective Care & Wellness:** For individuals and communities.
- **Connection:** Facilitate meaningful connections between youth organizations, workers, and advocates through shared spaces, meetups, and Communities of Practice.
- **Collective Impact:** Create avenues for collective funding, leveraging the strengths and resources of multiple organizations to drive impactful programs and projects.

WHO WE SERVE

Creative youth development (CYD) workers can be everyone from culture bearers, teaching artists and programming staff who work at nonprofit cultural organizations, social services and creative industries.

Ideal SCYDN Members:

SCYDN members are dedicated youth workers and advocates who bring diverse experiences, insights, and a commitment to creative youth development. They include individuals who:

- Have navigated trauma, challenges, and successes in CYD, and are open to sharing insights for mutual learning and problem-solving.
- Lead or work closely with youth councils, youth-driven programs, or workforce development initiatives.
- Connect youth with community resources, including programs, networks, health and wellness supports.
- Are committed to innovative and healing-centered approaches within youth development.
- Aspire to build positive career pathways and leadership opportunities within CYD spaces.

Representation and Engagement Priorities:

SCYDN prioritizes inclusive representation and values the interconnectedness of individuals over institutional ties. Members reflect a broad spectrum of community-based organizations and CYD work, including those addressing mutual aid, incarceration, domestic violence, and homelessness. The network strives to:

- Foster diverse, intergenerational engagement across sectors, including those beyond arts nonprofits.
- Maintain a flexible membership structure, avoiding rigid definitions of the “ideal” member profile.
- Recognize and uplift the unique perspectives and stakes of youth workers, ensuring CYD work remains inclusive and impactful.

OUTCOMES

Short-Term Outcomes

- **Enhanced Skills:** CYD workers gain knowledge and skills in healing-centered engagement.
- **Increased Support:** Stronger peer networks and support systems among CYD workers.
- **Empowered Workers:** CYD workers feel more empowered and confident in their roles.

Long-Term Outcomes

- **Improved Practices:** Sustained healing-centered practices in CYD programs.
- **Youth Well-Being:** Improved mental health and well-being of youth.
- **Creative Thriving:** Youth thrive creatively in supportive, healing-centered environments.
- **Resilient Communities:** Development of resilient and supportive CYD communities.

Youth Involvement

Intergenerational Network Members

Our network focuses on supporting youth workers rather than directly involving youth at this stage. This includes:

- Providing a dedicated space for youth workers to share, reflect, and grow without the expectation to directly support youth within this setting.
- Defining “youth” with flexibility: some youth workers may themselves be young adults just entering the workforce.
- Distinguishing between youth development work and youth workforce development is critical to understanding their unique purposes and approaches. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on creating a pipeline to support and cultivate the next generation of youth development professionals.
- Facilitating intergenerational exchange to foster mutual development and keep youth work practices relevant.

Supporting Young Youth Workers

Recognizing that younger youth workers have specific needs, we aim to:

- Identify those needs and determine who within the network can best meet them.
- Promote an environment of respect where experienced youth workers avoid condescension and foster positive mentoring relationships.

Incorporating Youth in SCYDN activities

If and when we decide to invite youth into the network, we commit to:

- Honoring the principle of “nothing about us without us,” ensuring youth have an active voice and agency.
- Providing equitable compensation for youth participation, valuing their time, energy, and insights equally with other members.
- Ensuring the network structure is well-developed and intentional before introducing youth, to foster a truly supportive space.
- Keeping the focus of the SCYDN on the youth workers; not becoming a youth-serving org.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE

SCYDN OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

This network is designed to evolve and adapt over time. We propose a 3-year plan with an initial structure, tasking the Steering Committee to guide the network, establish best practices, and address outstanding questions.

SCYDN Activities

Meetings held every other month will be led by healing-centered facilitators, offering a mix of virtual and in-person sessions to provide professional development, creative activities, and social support. Key activities include:

- Professional Development Workshops: Structured, skill-building sessions focused on strengthening youth workers' skills and growth.
- Training: Healing-centered engagement training tailored to CYD workers.
- Peer Support: Peer groups for sharing experiences, strategies, and support.
- Sub-Groups: Separate meetings for direct youth workers and administrative staff to address unique challenges and leverage their distinct experiences.
- Mentorship: Reciprocal mentorship programs connecting experienced and new CYD workers.
- Resource Development: Creation and distribution of healing-centered resources and toolkits.
- Event Formats: Emphasizing smaller, intimate gatherings to foster a safe, supportive environment. Future opportunities may include hosting larger gatherings, participating in conferences like the Bridge Conference, or collaborating with city-sponsored events like Creative Economy Career Day to connect with broader initiatives.

Ongoing Operational Activities

SCYDN should prioritize funding an administrative role responsible for:

- Managing meeting logistics.
- Tracking and organizing network materials as they develop.
- Maintaining communications.
- Managing an approved spending plan to support network activities.

Leadership Structure and Guiding Beliefs

We propose a Steering Committee comprising 5-8 nominated youth workers, who will also participate in the network. We suggest developing a sub-committee structure within the Steering Committee so that there can be operations & advocacy roles/focuses. Steering Committee members will receive stipends for their leadership work and collaboratively plan network activities, including:

- Setting topics for meetings and workshops.
- Identifying and securing facilitators.

- Ensuring SCYDN meets its activity goals as outlined above.

The Steering Committee will center the following beliefs in their work:

- Critical conversations addressing systemic issues and exploring solutions deserve funding.
- Healing is a continuous journey, requiring acknowledgment of the pressures and stressors inherent in CYD work.
- Collective impact, supported by strategic funding, drives meaningful community change.

Fund & Power Management

To ensure equitable decision-making, SCYDN will create a structure where both early-career and experienced youth workers share equal power and support.

- **Fund Allocation:** Determine how resources are distributed, including which projects or roles receive funding.
- **Power Dynamics:** Establish shared accountability for fund management. Consider partnerships with established organizations (e.g., Communities Rise, Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Third Stone) or forming a small coalition (3–4 organizations) to collectively manage funds.

By aligning with these principles and structures, SCYDN will cultivate a sustainable, impactful network for creative youth development in Seattle.

COSTS

The following budget outlines the anticipated expenses for the SCYDN network during years 1-3. It includes costs for a part-time contracted administrator, compensation for steering committee members, implementation of program activities throughout the year, and outreach efforts.

However, additional discussions and collective decision-making by the Steering Committee will be necessary to address outstanding items, such as determining the ideal staffing structure and support. We anticipate that this budget may evolve as the Steering Committee begins its work and refines priorities in the early stages of 2025.

Expense	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	NOTES
Administrative Support				
Part-time Network Admin Contracted Role	\$13,500	\$13,500	\$13,500	<i>10-15 hours/month of anticipated activity @ \$75/hour technology, physical meeting space, office supplies, and other software needs</i>
Operational Tools	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	
Printing	\$750	\$750	\$750	
Steering Committee				
5-8 Steering Committee Members	\$4,800	\$4,800	\$4,800	<i>\$600 annual participation stipends - 4 quarterly planning meetings with some work between activities and events x 8 members</i>
Annual Programming				
Meeting Space and Accessibility Needs	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	<i>meeting space, live sign/translation/captioning for meetings x 6 meetings</i>
Hospitality	\$2,400	\$2,400	\$2,400	
Community Engagement				
Conferences, National Travel	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$3,000	
Local Travel, Tabling, Community Buiding	\$500	\$750	\$1,000	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$26,450	\$26,700	\$28,450	\$81,600

Outstanding Questions & Next Steps

1. Engage Task Force Members as volunteers during Q1 2025 to continue proposal development focusing on the outstanding questions and points below.
2. Continue to develop proposal and seek funding, submitting to funders as appropriate
3. Share narrative & proposal with key supporters & national networks similar to SCYDN to continue to engage and make room for potential partnership.

Proposal Development

Develop & Add An Appendix & Resources

- Add an appendix with cited studies and resources, such as:
 - 2023 Healthy Youth Survey
 - ArtsFund data
 - School's Out Washington (SOWA) information
- Research and include data on arts organizations and youth development programs that have folded from 2020 to the present to emphasize the impact of stressors on the sector.

Enhancing Outcome Metrics

- Develop stronger metrics for funders, including:
 - How many people we aim to convene.
 - Methods for effective data collection and tracking.

Scalability & Regional Considerations

- Evaluate the model's scalability for urban areas and small cities (e.g., Bellingham, Yakima, Spokane) while recognizing the distinct challenges in rural regions.
- Document and share learnings and frameworks with ArtsWA and similar networks.

Insights from the Pandemic

- Highlight examples such as:
 - Mutual aid efforts like those listed by SouthEnd Emerald that filled gaps where government entities fell short.
 - Organizations that expanded operations during COVID-19 due to increased funding but now face challenges maintaining those levels with diminished resources.
- Address the importance of focusing on underserved youth who may not engage with traditional youth-serving agencies.

Role Development & Capacity Building

- Exercise caution around part-time roles that lack benefits; explore alternatives such as AmeriCorps-style roles or fellowship positions.
- Consider creating fellowship positions with a community distribution model supported by a backbone network and mentors.

Advocacy & Collaboration

- Emphasize that no single philanthropist or government entity can tackle this challenge alone.
- Advocate for equitable distribution of resources across districts and schools.
- Collaborate with DEEL, Parks departments, and other stakeholders to align efforts.
- Position SCYDN as a catalyst for broader capacity-building initiatives, using language that underscores this vision.

Steering Committee: Concerns & Key Questions

Inclusivity

- How do we ensure grassroots organizations aren't excluded from the network?

Budget & Compensation

- What specific budget items need funding, and what is the overall budget?
- How do we ensure fair compensation for individuals and groups involved?
- In case of insufficient funding, can an organization support the work temporarily while we secure additional resources?

Geographic Scope

- Will the network focus exclusively on Seattle, or extend beyond its boundaries?

Community Engagement

- How can we unite stakeholders around a process-driven approach, particularly for decolonizing work, rather than focusing solely on outcomes?

Membership & Participation

- What is the process for joining the network?
- What happens to the current roles of Task Force participants? Should there be a one-year commitment or other defined terms?
- How many members should the network include?

Interim Leadership

- Who will drive this work between funding periods?
- How do we partner with other organizations during interim periods without dedicated funding or leadership?
- Who will represent SCYDN and speak on its behalf during these times?