

## Increasing Youth Engagement & Leadership in Arts Organizations across Michigan

**Objective:** Support four arts-based organizations across Michigan to each build a youth advisory council. The aim of a youth advisory is to increase engagement and leadership by teens and to help them imagine new roles to plan projects, curate productions, promote events, recruit peers, fundraise, facilitate their own meetings and advise on organizational decisions.



### Introduction

When youth participate in high quality arts education opportunities they perform better academically, have higher rates of civic engagement and are more likely to pursue higher education – regardless of socioeconomic status. Arts education, however, is usually a discipline provided for or delivered to youth. Young people are taught the skills to perform music, create visual arts, write poetry or fiction, or put on a dance or theatrical performance.

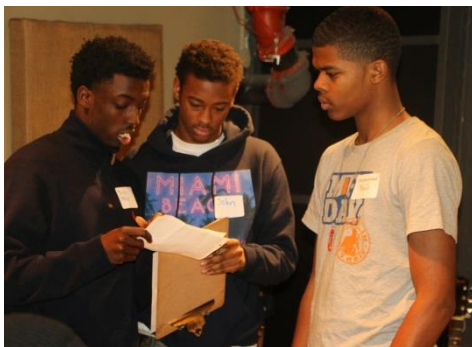
*What would happen if we provided youth supports and opportunities to take a greater leadership role in the creation and curation of their own arts activities within community arts organizations? How might arts education and engagement be more effective if youth partnered with the adults as co-creators in the process? What other youth skills could we foster through a different approach to youth engagement in the arts?*

### Why Provide Youth Greater Leadership Roles and Voice

Research demonstrates that providing youth greater voice and leadership in the programs that serve them has many benefits. When youth have opportunities to make meaningful contributions in an organization their participation grows, as does their engagement, interest, and investment. A greater leadership role not only provides young people all the current benefits of arts education, but provides new opportunities to develop 21st century skills such as problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and critical reflection. Finally, when young people are engaged in meaningful decisions it fosters their civic engagement, experiences that are critical if society expects them to become active citizens in a democratic society.

### What is Neutral Zone & Youth Driven Spaces?

The Neutral Zone, Ann Arbor's Teen Center got its start in 1998 and has grown into to a thriving, nationally recognized arts and leadership space that engages over 500 high school teens annually. One of the most important lessons we've learned is that teens thrive when they work in partnership with adults as active collaborators, decisions makers and problem solvers, and are recognized for their unique expertise.



For the past seven years the Neutral Zone, in partnership with the Weikart Center for Program Quality and Michigan State University's Community Evaluation Research Collaborative (MSU), has developed the Youth-Driven Spaces (YDS) model. YDS is designed to help organizations that serve older youth incorporate practices and strategies that use program, organization and governance roles as an opportunity to build youth proficiencies as well as increase their participation and engagement.

## Increasing Youth Voice & Engagement in Community-based Arts Organizations

With a recently funded grant from MCACA's New Leaders Council, Neutral Zone will provide intensive training and coaching to 4 arts organizations across Michigan to help them empower youth in new leadership roles. Through adopting YDS practice, organizations can support youth to imagine and plan projects, curate productions, promote events, recruit peers, fundraise, facilitate their own meetings, advise on broad organizational decisions, and even serve in governance roles. Each organization's council will develop initiatives based on youth participants' interests and ideas in alignment with the organization's mission.

## Professional Development & Support for Youth Engagement

Each of the 4 sites establishes a group of 8-15 teens to serve on their advisory council, supported by 2-4 adult advisors (staff can be complimented with volunteers). To prepare and support the youth/adult team Neutral Zone engages advisory councils from each of the organizations in intensive training and coaching over a 11-month period. The goals of training and coaching are to 1) help teams explore and understand their organization's mission and structure; 2) plan and implement youth-driven, mission-focused projects; 3) establish and sustain advisory council structures; and 4) explore ways for the council to be involved in higher order organizational and governance roles. *The inputs that guide the youth engagement model include:*



- **Intensive 2-day Residential Institute:** The goal of the institute is to help the youth/adult teams better understand the principles of meaningful youth engagement and to work on adopting youth-driven strategies. Adult members receive professional development to support a youth-driven approach and teen members are guided in structuring an action project to initiate when they return to their community. The institute itself is designed to model youth-driven practice and healthy adult-youth partnerships. ***The training is scheduled for October 21-22, 2017 in Jackson MI.***
- **Four (4) Coaching/Site Visits:** Throughout the next 10 months, Neutral Zone coaches provide site teams (youth and adults) with technical assistance, on a quarterly basis, that is tailored to meet the needs and goals of individual sites. Coaches: (a) provide additional professional development; (b) observe practice and provide feedback; (c) lead reflection on successes and challenges; and (d) consult on the development of structures and strategies to create a sustainable advisory council.
- **One-day Summit:** At the pilot project's mid-point, Neutral Zone will reconvene all cohort teams for a professional development program to reconnect with their peer cohort, invigorate groups, share successes, and provide new tools and training to develop a sustainable advisory council.

**Funding provided by MCACA New Leaders will pay the cost for all training and coaching services**, including the expenses associated with the 2-day, overnight residential training. Participating organizations will be expected to cover travel costs to the 2-day training and the mid-point summit.

## What Next?

If your organization is interested in participating we ask that you complete the application on the following page, and **return no later than noon on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017.**

A 45 minute **webinar**, scheduled for early September, will provide further overview of this program.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact John Weiss, Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Neutral Zone. 734-214-9995, ext 222 or [weiss@neutral-zone.org](mailto:weiss@neutral-zone.org)



## Neutral Zone Youth Engagement in Arts Organization 2017-18 Application

Applicant Name & Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

**In order to apply to be a part of the 2017-18 cohort, please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. Please limit responses to 2 pages.**

1. Why do you think increasing youth engagement is important for the success of your organization?
2. Describe how your youth have been involved in your organization's activities thus far. How could you imagine their roles expanding with the support of Neutral Zone's *Youth Driven Spaces, youth engagement model*?
3. Describe your capacity, readiness and commitment to supporting a youth advisory council in your setting. Administrative support? Which staff would play key support roles? Describe youth interest and readiness.
4. What kinds of things do staff need to learn or expand to effectively support a more youth involvement and the development of a youth advisory?
5. What challenges do you think you might face in developing and implementing increased youth decision making and youth advisory at your organization? How do you anticipate overcoming these challenges?

**Applications are due by noon on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017.**

Please return completed applications to John Weiss, Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Neutral Zone by email - [weiss@neutral-zone.org](mailto:weiss@neutral-zone.org)

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