

CREDIT-FOR-LEARNING



## Youth in Action (YIA)

Providence, Rhode Island

**150** Average number of students served during the school year

**53** Youth given stipends for their work during the 2022-2023 program year

**13** Part-time youth Co-Coordinators leading the agency and their peers in programming

Half of YIA's board are youth participants, including the board's co-chair

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ Nellie Mae Education Foundation
- ▶ Rhode Island Foundation
- ▶ 11th Hour, United Way of Rhode Island

## Nothing about us, without us, is for us.

Learn a coding language, conduct research in a professional lab setting, develop leadership skills, advocate for educational equity, or take a boat-building class: credit-for-learning programs in the afterschool space offer opportunities for students to learn new skills and individualize knowledge acquisition, complementing school-day lessons for middle and high school youth. Through student-centered, active approaches, youth can learn advanced scientific research techniques, foster foundational skills like empathy, resilience, and communication, and safely explore outside of their comfort zones.

### Overview

Youth In Action (YIA) is where youth tell their stories, practice leadership, and create change in their communities. YIA believes that youth and adults can learn from each other and work together to address issues within communities. At YIA, adults serve as mentors and allies, amplifying youth voices and collaboratively cultivating a space for genuine, sustainable youth-led work. YIA engages youth in social-emotional development and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills acquisition, such as facilitation, public speaking, critical thinking, conflict resolution/restorative practices, and identity work, giving youth the opportunity to practice change. To quote a former Executive Director, "YIA is where youth come to practice being human."

### A typical day for students

Youth in Action prioritizes a welcoming environment for youth. When youth enter the YIA house, they are immediately greeted by a staff member on the first floor, where other youth are usually lounging in bean bag chairs before programming begins. On their way to the second floor, they grab a snack and mingle with other youth on the blue couch in the living room. Programming always starts with "Bug-In," a YIA tradition that gives youth the space to share their name, age, pronouns and answer a fun question. After Bug-In, youth immerse themselves in activities to understand their identities and further build leadership skills.

### Outcomes

Youth at YIA are empowered to find strength in community, practice cultural humility, and learn how intersecting identities can mutually benefit and uplift each other. It's important to recognize that believing in and giving power to youth of marginalized identities can be an innovative catalyst for genuine,

transformative change. YIA alumni can be found throughout the state, region, and country in high-level leadership positions enacting transformative change. Each utilizes their 21<sup>st</sup> century and social-emotional leadership skill sets to establish their career paths. In many cases, alumni return as mentors, consultants, or even as YIA staff, proof that their time in the program was transformative and a pivotal moment in their lives and identities.

## Program characteristics

YIA works to serve youth in the educational and workforce gaps that the education system doesn't provide. This includes self-care, community care, identity and intersectionality education, equity lensing, social location, ethnic studies, 21<sup>st</sup> century Leadership Skills (such as conflict resolution, presentation, and public speaking, teamwork & collective leadership with a social justice lens), and employment practice. In order to accomplish this, YIA uses peer-to-peer models and student-centered development in a multi-year structure: Core, Immersion, and Collective. Neither is mutually exclusive, and each works in tandem to foster a youth-designed and facilitated model of growth and base building.

**Core** allows youth to explore their foundational “Core” (identities, values, culture, stories, and truths) and establish a unique leadership style. In **Immersion**, youth form Action Groups driven by the needs of their communities and organize youth toward transformative action. In **Collective**, youth push their leadership into new realms as staff and board members, leading workshops with schools and building coalitions in the community. Collective is what creates true accountability and gives youth tools to become lifelong change makers and leaders within their community and supports intergenerational leadership in other organizations, institutions and efforts. Often, work that starts as Action Groups becomes collective-level youth-run programs, like the Youth Action Board to End Youth Homelessness, TenYoungMen to End Domestic Violence, or the Outdoor Equity Group working on creating more outdoor access and environmental justice for BIPOC communities through intergenerational leadership. Youth are able to earn elective credit for their participation in YIA through a teacher of record at their school.

YIA understands the importance of having youth leadership at all levels of the organization to make this possible, which is why youth are hired as part-time Co-Coordinator (CoCos) to plan and lead both summer and year-round programming. CoCos also receive opportunities aside from programming; youth lead in areas such as development, digital engagement, executive strategy, and restorative justice. Even if they are not a part-time Co-Coordinator, youth still receive stipends for attending and participating in programming. Youth in Action does this because the need to

## The need for credit-for-learning opportunities

Credit-for-learning expands educational opportunities for youth, where young people can explore their interests and delve deeper into subject matter outside of the classroom. These programs provide diverse learning experiences, promote student engagement, and prepare students for life after graduation.



Boosting motivation and engagement



Improving college and career readiness



Addressing opportunity gaps

Read Credit-for-Learning: [Make Learning Outside of School Count](#) to learn more, and check out the [Start-Up Guide for Implementing Credit-for-Learning Programs](#) if you're interested in starting your own.





work to support themselves and their families is a barrier for youth to access programming, so by providing these funds, YIA is able to help young people focus on their self-development while supporting their communities. Besides, in much of their work, youth act as consultants and program design staff.

## Program history

YIA was founded in 1997 by four youth and one adult to respond to issues and inequities youth were facing in their communities. In 2002, with youth-led fundraising efforts, YIA was able to buy its current home in Providence. Over the past 27 years, youth have educated their peers and organized around sexual health, education, outdoor equity, ending domestic violence, and language justice, among so many other issues. Youth at YIA are represented across the state of Rhode Island as they lead coalitions and represent partner organizations beyond YIA.

## Recommendations

### *Recommendations for integrating youth voice and student-created curriculum to boost engagement:*

- ▶ In order to successfully integrate youth voices, we must understand that adultism is the first and biggest obstacle to youth leadership.
- ▶ Once we are able to acknowledge and dismantle adultism, we are able to empower and uplift youth and can then integrate youth authority at all levels of an organization.
- ▶ Providing space for youth to discover and understand their identities will help them to feel comfortable and open when interacting with others.
- ▶ When facilitating and evaluating curriculum, adults should be supporting, not leading; leading is the responsibility of youth.

