

CASE STUDY
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Foundation Gives Young Women Chance to Make Grant Decisions

By Rebecca Koenig



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In philanthropy, it often feels like a chasm divides charities from grant makers and donors from recipients. Those who stand to benefit the most from grant dollars usually don't have a say in how money gets spent.

"Problems and solutions live together in the same place," says Ana Oliveira, president of the New York Women's Foundation. For the organization's new Girls IGNITE Grantmaking Fellowship, that place is in the minds and hearts of young women.

Hoping to tap into the expertise of young women of color concerning the issues that affect them, the foundation and the YWCA of the City of New York teamed up to create a youth grant-making program that puts girls from the city in charge of awarding \$30,000 to different nonprofit projects.

The fellowship organizers put a lot of effort into recruiting a diverse group. The YWCA sought candidates from public and private schools, foster-care agencies, religious institutions, health centers, and LGBTQ organizations. It also reached out to groups in public-housing

communities to make sure that population was represented.

The result: 15 girls, ages 12 to 17, who reflect the variety of young women in New York City.

The group, which meets every two weeks for nine months, started its work in the fall of 2016 with leadership training and information sessions about the basics of philanthropy. There are lessons on how nonprofits operate and how to develop a request for proposal, among other topics. The participants are also learning about issues nonprofits tackles, such as reproductive health and racial equity.

The sessions so far have been "intense," says Jennifer Agmi, director of programs at the New York Women's Foundation. Although the girls initially thought giving money away would be easy, they changed their minds once they realized how many worthy causes could benefit from the funds they control.

"We see the girls really learning," Ms. Agmi says. "They're taking this role very seriously."

Eventually, the participants will put out a request for proposals, conduct site visits, and select which nonprofits to support.

In addition to the group grant making, they also learn about personal giving. Each girl receives a stipend of \$1,000 and is required to donate 10 percent to a nonprofit program.

"We're ... trying to shift the face of philanthropy," Ms. Agmi says. "Young people have great ideas and solutions to the challenges they face. They can see their contributions as important."

The fellowship organizers plan to host future cohorts of girls. They hope the program will both benefit nonprofits and provide useful lessons the participants can use as they enter adulthood.

"Ultimately what we want is to connect this work with their role in the future as leaders," Ms. Agmi says.

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