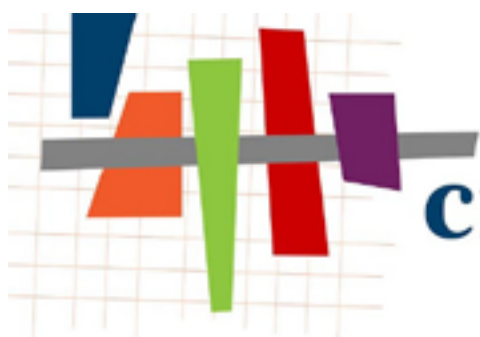# Mapping Skill to Will:

Approaches to Funding Creative Youth Development in the United States

creative youth
DEVELOPMENT

This publication is part of a series of tools created to enable deeper connections between creative youth development program leaders and funders:

- Building Funding Pathways: A Strategy Towards Expanding Funding for the Creative Youth Development Field
- Mapping Skill to Will: Approaches to Funding Creative Youth Development in the United States
- BAYCAT & The Golden State Warriors: A Case Story
- Memphis Music Initiative & ELMA Philanthropies: A Case Story
- The San Diego Creative Youth Development Network & The Clare Rose Foundation: A Case Story
- YMCA Lighthouse Project & The Heinz Endowments: A Case Story

The National Creative Youth Development Partnership is a collaborative effort by youth and adult field leaders committed to the CYD values of Racial Equity & Social Justice, Youth Voice and Leadership, and Collective Action in and with the community.
www.CreativeYouthDevelopment.org

Dedicated to the development of thriving communities and a more just world, Creative Generation works to inspire, connect, and amplify the work of young creatives who catalyze social transformation and those who are committed to cultivating their creative capabilities.
www.Creative-Generation.org

This report was authored by Jeff M. Poulin.

Introduction

Creative youth development (CYD) is a recent term for a longstanding theory of practice that integrates creative skill-building, inquiry, and expression with positive youth development principles, fueling young people's imaginations and building critical learning and life skills.

In 2018, the Creative Youth Development National Partnership, through grant funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, worked in concert with the broader field to drive collective action in three strategic priorities to advance creative youth development:

- Visibility & Impact: Documenting and Communicating Outcomes and Impact
- Funding: Building Pathways to Funding
- Field Building: Professional Development, Networking & Technical Assistance

Upon the publication of the *National Action Blueprint Outlines Strategies for Positive Change*, the Funding Action Team articulated their goal to help current and potential funders, alongside CYD practitioners, better understand how their work fit together and within the general funding landscape of arts/culture and education/youth development. Through theoretical and applied research, the Action Team has created tools, talking points, and a network of leaders to pursue broader pathways to funding CYD in communities across the United States.

Methodology

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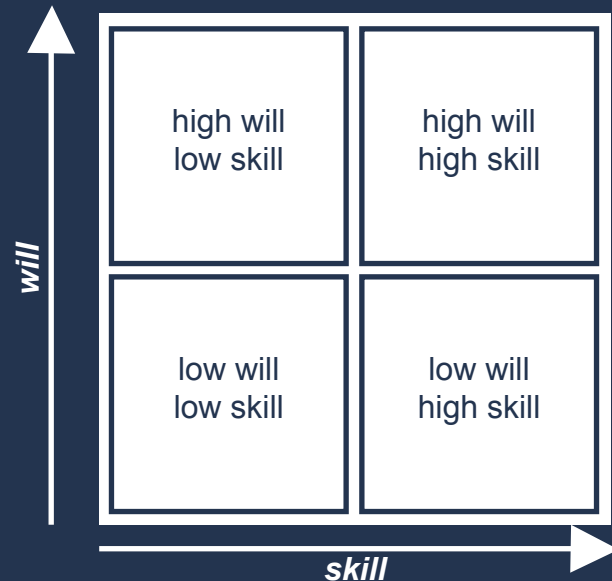
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Categories of Funding Approaches

The Skill/Will Map is a model developed by Hershey and Blanchard[1] in the Human Resources and business leadership sectors, which articulates four specific categories based on two factors:

- Skill: experience with a task, training, knowledge, and natural talents
- Will: desire to achieve, confidence in abilities, and attitude towards a task

high will low skill	high will high skill
low will low skill	low will high skill

will (vertical axis) **skill** (horizontal axis)

For purposes of this brief, we will adapt this model and examine four categories of funder behavior in relation to their experience funding CYD and their organization's attitudes about funding CYD. It should be noted that no category is more positive or negative than any other, but rather these categories were designed to help funders (and their CYD program partners) better understand how to navigate the current circumstances they are experiencing.

Our research indicated several key metrics, which align with the high to low scale in both categories of skill and will. They are:

- Will – these have to do with the institutional policies of funding entities:
  - CYD named in strategic funding priorities
  - Investment in and engagement with CYD programs in funding portfolio
  - Engagement with CYD programs and leaders in non-grantmaking activities
- Skill – these have to do with the individual skills of the grantmaker or program officer:
  - Strong Relationships and open/transparent communication with CYD leaders
  - Co-creation of services for CYD programs and leaders
  - Peer-to-peer knowledge exchange with CYD grantees and other funders

We have developed a short critically reflective assessment for funders and program officers to complete provide guidance as to which category you may currently fit.

As part of this research, four case stories were produced to illuminate the factors present in high skill/high will, low skill/high will, and high skill/low will funders and their CYD program partners.

The stories showcase the key collaborators, big takeaways, and advice for funders and programs in tandem with the story of the partnership's development. The case stories can be found listed on the inside cover of this publication.

[1] Situation Leadership Theory was originally published by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1969 as part of their book, *Management of Organization Behavior.*

A project of the Creative Youth Development National Partnership

Reflective Assessment

Question	Level of Agreement on a Scale of 1-10
Will	
Do my/our current strategic funding priorities include CYD programs of theory of practice?	
Do I/we seek to engage with the CYD ecosystem in my/our grantmaking?	
Do I/we currently involve CYD or CYD-adjacent programs in our non-granting activities?	
"Will" Score:	
Skill	
Do I/we currently have strong relationships and open/transparent communication with CYD program practitioners in my/our service area?	
Do I/we co-create services to support CYD programs/practitioners in my/our area?	
Do I/we engage in peer-to-peer knowledge exchange with CYD grantees or other funders in my/our network?	
"Skill" Score:	

High Skill/High Will – Field Builders | *Scores: Skill: 15-30 / Will: 15-30*

This category of funders actively funds and supports CYD and CYD-adjacent organizations and programs and identifies as part of the CYD landscape of their community or funding region. They look to leverage their CYD funding work and impact to grow the field of CYD and to increase the profile and importance of the work as a strategic priority area in the philanthropic community.

Funders in this category often have an explicit CYD funding focus and act as a catalyst for the CYD ecosystem within their grantmaking region. They may serve as a convener for CYD programs as well as other funders to co-create strategic investment plans and support infrastructures for programs and staff, ultimately impacting the youth served by programs. Together, they increase the amount of funding going to CYD programs, by working strategically across the ecosystem to decrease barriers to access and increase the quality of programs and services for young people.

As an example, both Memphis and San Diego have funders who work as catalysts in their respective regions. Together, these funders and CYD programs catalyze changes within the cultural and education ecosystems to advance the CYD field of practice and ultimately positively benefit youth. The program officers and CYD program practitioners co-create the structures of how they work together and facilitate mutual growth and learning opportunities. More about the partnerships in Memphis and San Diego can be found in their case stories.

Low Skill/High Will – Potential Stars | *Scores: Skill 0-15 / Will: 15-30*

This category of funders actively funds or seeks to fund CYD and CYD-adjacent organizations and programs, but struggles with aligning those investments to existing strategic priorities. They often have limited CYD portfolios due to a struggle with articulating the impact of CYD programs and investments.

Funders in this category may be non-traditional funders (like corporations or individuals) or philanthropic organizations who are not focused in the CYD or adjacent sectors. However, the program officers or individuals involved display a keen interest in CYD programs and their impact in communities. Most often relationships between CYD programs and these funders are based on interpersonal relationships and may shift unexpectedly due to personnel changes.

As an example, the Golden State Warriors have a strong relationship with BAYCAT, a CYD program in the San Francisco Bay Area. Emerging from a personal relationship, this partnership grew into a multi-faceted collaboration involving student work placements, grantmaking, and earned revenue streams. The long-term cultivation and maturity of the partnership stemmed from time investment and strategic thinking about mutually beneficial outcomes for both the team and the CYD program. More about this partnership can be found in their case story.

High Skill/Low Will – Reluctant Allies | *Scores: Skill: 15-30 / Will: 0-15*

This category of funder actively funds and supports CYD and CYD-adjacent organizations and programs, but do not see themselves as part of the CYD ecosystem.

Funders in this category may have a long-standing relationship with a CYD grantee, due to their application in the culture or education portfolios. Their funding justifications may fall into the category of cultural preservation or K-12 academic achievement. The program officer sees value in the CYD practice occurring within the program but does not consider the foundation's work a part of the local CYD community, due to a lack of alignment with the grantmaking portfolio's strategic priorities.

As an example, the Heinz Endowments, several years ago, began funding CYD programs in Pittsburgh, PA. They engaged with CYD programs as part of the youth development network and cultural fabric of their grantmaking region, but not because of their work at the intersection of both. Initially, CYD programs were invited to participate in a critical learning community due to their affiliation with the YMCA, another grantee. Over time, both the CYD program matured and the grantmaking portfolio developed to include CYD programs as part of their creative learning work. More about this partnership can be found in their case story.

Low Skill/Low Will – Potential Funders | *Scores: Skill: 0-15 / Will: 0-15*

This category of funders does not currently fund CYD organizations or programs nor is currently knowledgeable about CYD as a field of practice. They do, however, demonstrate potential based on their strategic funding priorities.

Funders in this category may fund other arts/culture or youth/education programs in a given region where CYD programs exist, however they focus their attention on elements beyond the scope of the CYD field of practice.

As an example, a family foundation may specific fund the purchasing and dissemination of instruments of high school band programs. This foundation is keenly aware of the benefits of music education but observes a very strict mandate of funding supplies for school-based participatory music programs.

Findings

Upon completion of collection and analysis, the data suggests several interwoven trends in behavior of funders in relation to their CYD program counterparts across the four categories of skill and will: building relationships, equalizing power, and collaborating.

First, in order to successfully navigate the complex nature of human relationships in grantmaking, both funders and CYD programs must focus on building relationships: with individuals, between institutions, and within their communities. The strength of relationships between funders and CYD programs exist, primarily, between individuals; investing time in interpersonal connections will build a solid foundation for the partnership. However, funding relationships should exist beyond the singular people orchestrating them, thus the most resilient funding partnerships exist when CYD programs and funding bodies articular mutual benefit as organizations, beyond dollars and cents. Similarly, the joint programming that comes from the funding relationship between program and funder, must seek a deep and responsive relationship with the community it operates within.

Second, funders and CYD programs must seek to equalize power in their relationships. The first step of balancing the power dynamic comes in the form of open and transparent communication. Next, the partnership must create safe, shared spaces for learning and reflection. And finally, they must explicit acknowledge and actively work to transform the imposed power dynamics that comes from grantmaking. When CYD programs and funders critically engage in the shifting of power imbalance between them, they are able to grow and mature their partnership for the mutual benefit and growth of the CYD program and grantmaking portfolios they each represent.

Third, successful partnerships between CYD programs and funders must collaborate to enable shared learning and foster deeper relationships with communities. By learning together, the partnership opens a space of vulnerability and agility to adapt to the changing needs of their work. Additionally, by deepening the relationship with the community they serve, together, the partners actively respond to the needs of that community, not just their own institutions.

Regardless of the skill or will, individuals operating within the CYD and philanthropic sectors can improve their own abilities and successfully navigate the structures that govern their work.

Recommendations

Through this research, we recognize that funding is a complex system that only moves at the speed of the individuals within it. Thus, we applaud the funders and program officers who seek to learn, understand, and grow by reading reports like this one.

We also recognize that there is perpetually room to grow. Our recommendations for the field are as follows:

1. Develop your own skills and encourage your peers and institutions to do the same – better yet, develop your skills in collaboration with your funding partners and grantees.

2. Commit to equalizing power between funded organizations, programs and practitioner and your grantmaking institutions; but first, engage in a conversation about this with your funded partners.

3. Amplify the work of CYD programs within your network to your peer funders – this is a great way to kick off peer-to-peer learning.

4. Work to change, broaden, or specify your funding priorities to include CYD.
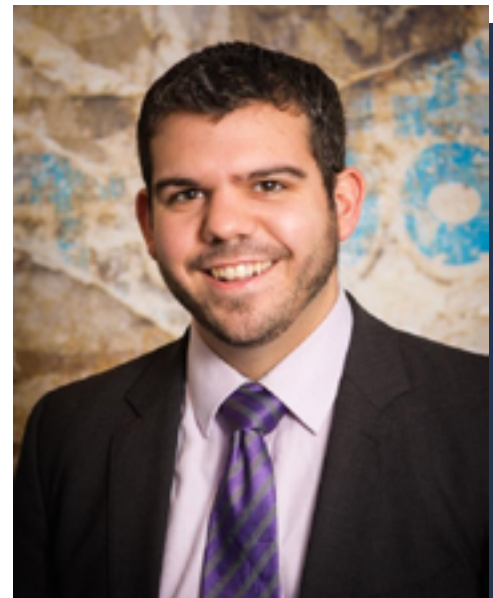
Author

Jeff M. Poulin is an American educator, non-profit administrator, and social entrepreneur whose work takes a justice approach towards uncovering local solutions for global challenges.

With over a decade of experience in the fields of cultural policy and education, Jeff leads Creative Generation, working to inspire, connect, and amplify the work of young creatives and those committed to cultivating their creative capabilities.

His work has influenced worldwide movements supporting arts and cultural education. He is widely published and has presented at conferences and universities across the country and around the globe. Jeff currently teaches at several universities and consults with regional, national, and international institutions.

He hails from Portland, Maine and studied arts management, cultural policy, and education.

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