



YOUTH ORGANIZING IN AMERICA: NINE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



With roots that can be traced back more than 100 years, American youth organizing is, at its heart, a grassroots effort to fight for justice and systemic change while supporting the individual and collective development of youth.

Given the breadth and grassroots nature of youth organizing, it would be understandable if we lacked a comprehensive, nationwide portrait of its landscape.

Yet for the past two decades, the [Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing \(FCYO\)](#) has conducted a series of field scans that take stock of the key issues and opportunities of the groups and youth involved in the movement.

This month, FCYO released the [results](#) of its most recent scan, conducted in 2020 in partnership with the [Research Hub for Youth Organizing](#), a joint initiative of the [Center for Community-Based Learning and Research \(CU Engage\)](#) and the [National Education Policy Center \(NEPC\)](#), both of which are housed in the [School of Education](#) at the [University of Colorado Boulder](#).

The year-long research project included surveying 312 youth organizing groups and conducting interviews and focus groups with 59 youth organizing leaders across 38 different organizations. The data collection was set against the dramatic backdrop of youth involvement in the growing racial justice movement, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the divisive 2020 election cycle. Here are a few insights about youth organizing gleaned from the in-depth FCYO 2020 Field Scan.

- 1. Youth organizing appears to be growing.** In 2020, 312 organizations responded to the *2020 National Youth Organizing Field Scan*, which is nearly twice as many as responded a decade earlier (137). (An important caveat is that it's not possible to say how much of this growth is real and how much is due to stronger networking and communications practices by FCYO and the researchers and variations in the survey methods used for earlier scans.)
- 2. Growth appears to be especially explosive in the Southern United States.** The Field Scan identified 56 organizations in the South, up from 13 in 2010.
- 3. Youth organizing is growing more inclusive.** The share of organizations counting LGBTQ youth among their core leaders has increased from 39 percent to 75 percent in the past 10 years. In addition, 99 percent of organizations now count people of color among their core leaders, up from 76 percent a decade earlier.
- 4. Youth organizing organizations are intergenerational.** Seventy percent of groups include adults over 25 among their leaders. The share of groups involving alumni in their programming has increased from 61 percent to 75 percent since 2013. At the same time, the share of organizations involving younger students between the ages of 11 and 13 has increased since 2013, from 15 percent to 29 percent.
- 5. Youth organizing groups are allied.** Nearly all (98 percent) are members of networks or alliances. Most report that these alliances are national in scope.
- 6. Youth organizing groups' budgets are on the rise.** Youth organizers reported an average budget of \$546,653 in 2020. That's an increase from 2010 and 2013 when most reported budgets under \$350,000 (the equivalent of \$416,492 in 2020 dollars). Most say that foundations provide at least three quarters of their budgets.
- 7. Although budgets have increased, organizers still need more resources.** For example, the share of organizations with at least one full-time staff organizer declined from 86 percent in 2010 to 65 percent in 2020. Despite their reliance on philanthropy, less than half of groups have someone devoted to development. These descriptive statistics suggest a need for additional resources.
- 8. Education, systems reforms, health, and voting are the four top primary issues for youth organizing groups.** These top issues have remained relatively consistent over time, although systems reforms were not included on the last survey.
- 9. Organizing groups are developing new strategies for building power.** Whereas the field was focused on leadership development in the 1990s, the field is now developing increasingly sophisticated strategies for building and leveraging the power of youth to create systemic change.

Reflecting on the project, co-author Dr. Michelle Renée Valladares explains, "The final report tells the deep work of youth organizing over the last 20 years but also offers a glimpse of a field juggling ongoing activism, the growing movement for racial reckoning and a global pandemic."

The report's authors are Siomara Valladares (Faculty Co-Director for CU Engage and Re-

search Hub principal investigator and co-principal investigator), Michelle Renée Valladares (NEPC Associate Director, Fellow, and Research Hub co-principal investigator), Matt Garcia (doctoral student researcher), Kate Baca (doctoral student researcher), and Ben Kirshner (Research Hub co-principal investigator and NEPC Fellow) all of the University of Colorado Boulder; Veronica Terriquez of the University of California Los Angeles; Jonathan Sanchez of the University of California Santa Cruz; and Kel Kroehle of FCYO.

The report authors and youth organizing leaders will share more from the report at this free webinar Wednesday May 20, 1-2:30 p.m. Eastern.

Interested in learning more about youth organizing in America?

- **Read:**
 - *20 Years of Youth Power: The 2020 National Youth Organizing Field Scan*. CU Boulder researchers Siomara Valladares, Michelle Renée Valladares, Matt Garcia, Kate Baca and Ben Kirshner are lead authors of the report.
 - *FCYO'S 2020 Funder Scan: Investing in the Power of Young People*
- **Register for:**
 - This [free webinar](#): Organizing to Win: 20 Years of Youth Power, 1-2:30 p.m. Eastern, May 20, 2021
 - This [free webinar](#): Equity to Win: Health at the Center, 1-2:30 p.m. Eastern, June 24, 2021

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