



Eureka! A YAC Strategy to Illuminate Philanthropy

Ashton Hartman, Berks Catholic High School senior and Berks County Community Foundation Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) president, explains, “Grantmaking doesn’t offer those ‘aha’ moments; it’s more of a ‘eureka,’ a scientific discovery, where you make observations, learn existing best practices, and then everything falls together over time.”

their annual budget. Since 2001, YAC members have been fundraising to grow an endowment of \$500,000, with an eventual goal of giving away \$25,000 per year. With this goal in mind, the YAC members are responsible for soliciting donations for the endowment from community members when they aren’t deciding grants.



THE BERKS COUNTY COMMUNITY
 FOUNDATION YOUTH ADVISORY
 COMMITTEE (YAC) GIVES AWAY

\$15,000

EACH YEAR TO LOCAL
 ORGANIZATIONS THAT
 BENEFIT YOUTH.

Sixty-five miles northwest of Philadelphia, in Berks County Pennsylvania, a group of 30 high school students are using fundraising as a tool to learn about and practice better grantmaking.

“We spend about half of our year executing the grantmaking cycle. We decide on a theme for the grant cycle, create a request for proposals, conduct site visits, deliberate the applications, and then make our funding recommendations.” The YAC, which currently gives away \$15,000 to organizations that benefit youth in Berks County, didn’t always have as much money in

“Fundraising has become more of a focus for our YAC in recent years; we’ve been practicing how to ask potential donors for gifts. During our retreat, we do a lot of role playing where one person will pretend to be the potential donor and one person will try to convince them to make a donation,” shares Ashton. By practicing the “art of the ask,” as he calls it, YAC members not only feel more prepared to effectively secure donations, but they also feel more confident about the importance of their grant dollars. “The youth are really in charge of the fundraising process. We have teams that are responsible for each donor, and we divvy up the roles so some people work on writing the script, some people set the meetings, and others actually make the ask,” says Ashton, “after all the practice, we usually feel really confident and comfortable in the role.”

Once the grantmakers have prepared and practiced their fundraising strategy,



their first task is to secure donations from their community foundation's board of directors. YAC advisor Maggie Place explains, "It wouldn't be effective to ask the YAC to start fundraising by making cold calls; it's intimidating and generally doesn't see very high success rates. By targeting the board first, the YAC can practice fundraising with a group of potential donors that are already somewhat invested in their work. Each time the board turns over, we have an opportunity to practice some preliminary prospect research, and to cultivate new potential donors."

 **Tip:** Give youth the opportunity to fundraise toward an endowment and learn the "art of the ask" to support their grantmaking program.

"Part of what makes a good ask is being able to say exactly why the project is so important, so we get the chance not only to raise money, but also to share the awesome work the YAC is doing," comments Ashton, which is what makes targeting the board a doubly smart strategy. The grantmakers are able to share how their funding choices align with the community foundation's core values. Additionally, Maggie notes, "The YAC otherwise doesn't have very much engagement with the board, and when the board gets new members, it's important for us to be able to have this opportunity to educate them about the program."

Not only do the grantmakers and the endowment benefit from these solicitations, but the donors do as well. "The only time that the youth and adult boards get together is at the end of the year when the YAC makes its recommendations, and the board of directors has a chance to comment. We use the solicitation to engage board members and teach them about our project. It helps them to have a more robust understanding of the YAC's work, and keeps them up to date and informed," shares Maggie.

The eureka of the Berks County YAC is twofold: YAC members are empowered in learning just how impactful their giving can be, and at the same time, the community foundation's board members see firsthand the significance and power of what the YAC does in the community. "It's so important to be willing to give, and I wouldn't have realized it if I didn't have to ask for donations," shares Ashton. Maggie agrees, "Our youth learn not only what to ask grant applicants, but they also learn what to ask and share to convince someone else to give them money. That's the eureka; they understand so much more profoundly the value of the money they're giving away because they've worked hard to raise it in the first place."

What arose first as a practical fundraising tactic became a convenient and effective way to spark understanding and create dialogue between two powerful boards in Berks County.



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This case study was written by Kylie Musolf and developed for Foundation Center's Youth Giving project. Photo provided courtesy of the Berks County Community Foundation Youth Advisory Committee. Visit youthgiving.org to view other free resources related to engaging young people in grantmaking.
