



NURTURING THE NEXT GENERATION LEADERS VISION

FOR YOUTH BY YOUTH – AUGUST 2023 GATHERING

Background



In the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mastercard Foundation –in partnership with the Talloires Network and paNhari– assembled a group of Next Generation Leaders (36 university students in 18 countries around the world). We invested in young people by providing the necessary resources to elevate their voices, perspectives, and experiences. To support their full participation, we provided accessibility (laptops and cell phones) and inclusion services (sign language translation) as well as coaching and mentorship. To cultivate professional and personal relationships across the international group, we offered regular skill-building and networking opportunities (trainings, design competitions, workshops, and interviews) via Zoom. They collaborated virtually for two years to design plenary and breakout sessions on topics of importance to them, which they delivered at the 2021, Talloires Network Leaders Conference in 2021 (co-hosted by Harvard University and Tufts University).

Their recommendations for transforming institutions of higher education reached more than 1,400 participants in 53 countries around the world. The 2023 For Youth, By Youth planning grant from the Mastercard Foundation is a response to their request to create a sustainable, youth-led movement with expanded reach and impact. The grant supports a sequence of activities – including the August workshop and conference – that will lead to the development of a proposal for a multi-year initiative that is conceptualized and operationalized for youth, by youth. The Next Generation Leaders are leading the way.



Next Generation Leaders alumni, Harvard University

¹ A strong majority (78%) of Next Generation Leaders named the United States as the location where they wanted to meet in-person for the first time and work hand-in-hand to develop their proposal for a multi-year, student-led initiative. 100% indicated availability to travel internationally in August 2023. They expressed an interest in touring Harvard University.



Overview

The For Youth, By Youth Workshop and Conference of Next Generation Leaders was held at the Essex Woods Meeting & Retreat Center in Essex, Massachusetts (20 – 25 August 2023). Located less than a mile from the ocean, the Center includes two contemporary buildings on seventeen wooded acres surrounded by conservation land. Other gathering spaces include perennial gardens and pond, patio and lawn area, walking trails, large fire circle, wood fired sauna, and oversized hot tub, dining hall, and dormitories. Other conference sites included Tufts University, Harvard University, and the City of Boston.



I was able to meet different people from different backgrounds, who prior to Boston were only fellow NGL members but during our time in Boston we became friends– who have helped me to grow personally and professionally.

-Anonymous,

feedback from September 2023 survey

Reflections and Learnings from Select Activities

Welcome and Union of Personal Artifacts

Monday morning was a miraculous moment for the group. Finally, and for the first time, we were gathered in-person. Outside, in the fire circle, we emphasized the power of imagination to change the world. We also acknowledged that the human experience is stressful and many of us are struggling. We invited young people to say a few words by coming forward, stating their full name, institutional affiliation, and home country. Each person brought a personal artifact to share with the group.



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"The agenda was quite packed so maybe a little lighter, more yoga would also be welcome."

-Anonymous,

feedback from September 2023 survey

Framework for the Week

In our opening remarks, we encouraged the Next Generation Leaders (NGL alumni) to challenge conventional norms and question assumptions, urging them to confront longstanding paradigms. We set a fundamental tone for the gathering, placing a strong emphasis on fostering critical thinking and openness to novel ideas. We emphasized the need to articulate aspirations and envision more promising futures, both on a personal level and as a collective group. We underscored the significance of adopting a comprehensive approach to problem-solving and learning by merging ancient wisdom with contemporary knowledge to achieve their future goals.

We introduced the central theme of the five great elements (earth, water, fire, air, and ether), which would serve as the organizing framework for the week's activities and discussions. Each day of the gathering was dedicated to one of these elemental themes, aligning with specific activities and objectives tailored to each element. These thematic elements provided a well-structured framework, allowing alumni to delve into various facets of their own identities and their environment. By doing so, they experienced a balanced and holistic journey that seamlessly integrated physical, intellectual, and imaginative dimensions, ultimately promoting personal and collective growth throughout the gathering.



Naming Grounded Realities and Community Challenges



EARTH

Earth represents qualities of stability, structure, and grounding. It is heavy, stable, and provides a solid foundation for all living creatures. On the first day of the gathering, alumni focused on Earth's attributes, which encouraged them to ground themselves in the present moment. Our morning session embarked on a transformative journey named "Grounded Realities and Imagining New Ecosystems." This experience began with activities aimed at grounding us in the present, free from external distractions. We expressed the most urgent challenges faced by our respective communities through art. Our activities aimed to situate everyone together in Essex Woods without distractions from the outside world, fostering a sense of connection to the physical environment and to each other. This grounding experience helped establish a common starting point for the week, encouraging NGL alumni to explore their own roots and understand their place in the larger context of the gathering.



Key Takeaways

Alumni expressed the feeling that colonization has disconnected us from nature, ourselves, and each other. They shared that they are saddened and frustrated by the systems and conditions they have inherited (structural racism, climate change, growing inequality). They see and feel that the world is on fire. They struggle with “severe anxiety” and feelings of helplessness and despair as they seek to create a brighter future for themselves and those around them.

Building a Model of Transformative Leadership

After a gentle yoga class, we facilitated a journaling exercise. Students reflected on such questions as: What fills your heart with joy? What would you want to be remembered for by the people who live on after you? What do you have to let go of to bring your vision into reality? They teamed up with another person and shared their ideas.

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***"Built on past lessons,
we're paving the way for
tomorrow's learners,
igniting the spark of
possibility and dreaming
big for the future of NGL."***

-Mercy





Next, we gave the alumni baskets of art supplies. We invited each of them to build a personal model representing the dream for their future self – a vision of their professional reality in the year 2033. The parts to consider included: Foundation (what in your life provides the foundation for the future that you want to create); Purpose (gets you out of bed in the morning); Influence (the people, institutions, and/or issues you will be able influence); Resources (the resources you will have at your disposal); Relationships (who will help you to realize your dream); Challenges (anticipated obstacles, the forms of resistance); Impact (reach and impact of your work), Legacy (the idea you seek to nurture and grow).



The activities were not only focused on the growth of the program, but also on our personal and professional growth through building our personal model of transformative leadership and being dared to dream a bigger dream for ourselves.

-Anonymous,

feedback from September 2023 survey



Designing a Global Initiative



ETHER

Imagining New Ecosystems

Ether, often associated with space and expansiveness, represents boundless possibilities and creativity. It is clear, subtle, and encourages freedom of imagination. On the second day, alumni transitioned from the grounded qualities of Earth to the expansive qualities of Ether. This shift allowed for a break from routine and encouraged participants to let loose, have fun, and dream. We shifted from addressing real-world challenges to playful activities, like dancing and dreaming, encouraging us to envision new horizons and ecosystems for positive change in our shared journey.



During our session entitled "Shark Tank," alumni organized into three groups, each immersed in a creative and imaginative exploration of the program's future possibilities. This exercise resonated with the qualities of Ether, as it encouraged expansive and boundaryless thinking while designing a global initiative – For Youth, By Youth. Just as Ether serves as a canvas for the universe, the alumni used their collective imagination to paint a picture of the program's potential evolution, envisioning enriching experiences for future cohorts, sustainability strategies, and their own continued involvement. Much like Ether's role in fostering creativity and freedom, this session allowed them to transcend conventional boundaries and cultivate innovative ideas for shaping the program's future.



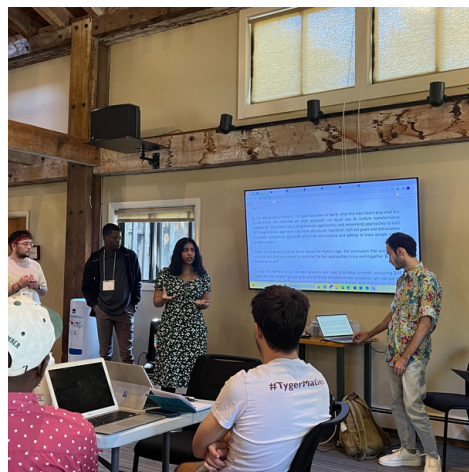
Key Takeaways

Vision. To collaboratively build an organized and sustained global movement of student activists who are (1) supported to address local issues, (2) connected across international boundaries, and (3) empowered at their home university to influence institutional policies and practices.

Youth-Led. They want to build on the Next Generation Leaders program. For Youth, By Youth will “come from the hearts, souls, and minds of young people. They will determine the pace and the themes (e.g., gender equity, climate science, social entrepreneurship).

Structure. They envision several 3-year cycles. Year one is for bonding, training, skills development, receiving mentorship, and creating a plan of action with your community. Year two is for implementing and evaluating local projects with communities. Year three is for serving as a mentor and managing the initiative.

Essential activities and resources. Mentorship and coaching (receiving and providing), skill-building (training); networking (guest speakers); seed funding to implement community-based projects and to write policy briefs in their area of study; access to resources (technology, books); international travel and speaking opportunities (Talloires Network conferences).



Our Story of Transformative Learning and Leadership



FIRE

Transformation and Reflective Leadership

Fire, symbolizing heat, sharpness, and brilliance, epitomizes transformation and the ability to pierce through darkness with illuminating vigor. During days three and four of our gathering, the qualities of Fire took center stage, fueled by the fiery passion of the NGL alumni.

We slightly adjusted our agenda to better align with alumni's deep desires. They wanted to spend more time translating their visions into written form (grant proposal writing) and articulate their dreams for the global initiative. They self-organized into two teams: the Story Team, charged with crafting a compelling video narrative, and the Writing Team, meticulously documenting and structuring the rich conversations from the week.



Key Takeaways

They formed a Storytelling Team. They seek to elevate voices and uncover hidden stories to raise awareness, foster empathy, inspire action, amass support, and change communities. Create a documentary film or a series on Netflix The Storytelling team focused on elevating voices and uncovering hidden stories. Their dream is to create a documentary film or a series to raise awareness, foster empathy, inspire action, amass support, and change communities. They believe their global collaboration, and the work they are doing in their home communities, may serve as a beacon of hope for young people around the world.



"Leaders draw inspiration from others, just as they inspire those around them; it's a cycle of influence where being exemplary sets the tone."

-Harunah



Closing Celebration



WATER

Cohesion and Connection

Water represents cohesion and connection. It carries nutrients and is essential for assimilation. It is liquid, cleansing, and has adhesive qualities that hold disparate things together. We culminated our gathering with a Closing Celebration, focusing on cohesion and connection. Much like water's liquid nature, our alumni came together to solidify their bonds and nurture the seeds of collaboration planted during the week.





During this closing celebration, we embraced the adhesive qualities of Water, which bind disparate elements into a harmonious whole. It was an opportunity for our NGL alumni to reflect on their experiences, connect with one another, and grow collectively. As we distributed Certificates of Participation, we recognized the power of unity and collaboration in propelling us forward. These certificates not only symbolized individual achievements but also the collective strength forged through shared ideas, goals, and experiences. In embracing the essence of Water, we set the stage for future collaborations and the continued growth of our NGL community.



It was the most amazing session ever. I was going through a lot at the time, but the love and care kept me engaged and committed. I was also able to plan and set a new drive for my professional journey.

-Anonymous,

feedback from September 2023 survey



Farewells



AIR

Movement and Consciousness

Air is characterized by qualities of mobility, breath, and consciousness. It is associated with the flow of energy and serves as a vehicle for movement. On the last day of the gathering, alumni were encouraged to understand Air as breath, representing the flow of consciousness and life force. Many of them would be physically moving, flying home, on this day, aligning with the theme of Air's mobility. We provided an opportunity to reflect on experiences and growth throughout the week and how they can carry these newfound insights and connections into the wider world.



Diversity and Flexibility



Alumni yearn to be seen, valued, and empowered to lead the way. The video narrative created by the Story Team celebrates the diversity of the group. Initially strangers, today the alumni are colleagues and friends.

To watch the video, please follow this link. <https://youtu.be/ILoeUIOUlgl>

They expressed their need for a safe space where they come together as a global community of future leaders, cultivate a sense of belonging and purpose, support each other, share their dreams, and realize their full potential.

Alumni and other youth around the world are seeking opportunities to connect, to learn useful skills, receive guidance and support, and use their minds, hearts, and hands to make a difference in their communities.

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In all our diversity, we shared cultures, caring, struggles, leadership, dreams, and love.

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-Maria



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"Leaders must be flexible, resilient, and strong to effectively guide and empower future generations."

-Karen

