

# MO PROJECT

## Healthy Youth Leaders– BEST PRACTICE REPORT *“Creating Our Future Youth Leaders in Obesity & Diabetes Prevention”*

### INTRODUCTION

In the movement to prevent obesity and diabetes among children and youth, it has become increasingly clear that the use of media can have a large impact. The quantity of food purchase messages directed at young people is staggering. At the same time, media making (e.g., videos and social media) has become more and more accessible, and today’s youth are proficient in many formats. CANFIT strives to 1) train youth on becoming leaders in promoting healthier environments and; 2) create mechanisms that will engage more youth in obesity and diabetes prevention efforts. Specifically, we want youth to create messages that will attract their peers and support a larger movement to improve food and physical activity environments, and increase the health of communities.

### About this Document

This document was designed as a best practice tool for anyone working with youth – at a school based health center, after school program and/or community group - to engage them in obesity or diabetes prevention. It also provides recommendations for implementing effective youth leadership trainings and/or projects and for designing & executing a youth media contest.

Although the focus is on obesity and diabetes prevention, many of the ideas presented here can also apply to other issues and different types of youth projects -- including social marketing campaigns or performance events. This format also allows agencies that are not interested in executing a project of this scope and duration to pick and choose the elements they find most helpful.

### What is MO Project?

CANFIT created the MO Project in 2008 to encourage youth to use media and video for use in community advocacy. The MO Project was specifically designed to engage low-income youth of color who want “MO” (i.e., more) access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities in their school and community. MO Project recognized that young people are more likely to participate in environmental-change organizing work if ideas were easily understood and presented in a fun, interactive atmosphere.

MO Project utilized an online media contest to engage hard-to-reach youth in urban and rural communities. The project exceeded expectations with 200 video submissions and 423 registered youth on the MO Project website. Across California, 364 youth were trained to use videos and spoken word to advocate for healthier community environments. MO Project videos were used in school board and city council meetings; shared with legislators and funders; became part of healthy corner store and joint use campaigns; and delighted and informed audiences at state and national conferences. Several MO Project-trained youth went on to present at national forums, become peer teachers at schools, and work with other community health initiatives.

Social media and new communication technologies were the “hook” that brought diverse youth together. In CANFIT’s experience, many youth in low income communities and communities of color

are interested in learning how to live healthier lives, advocate for health-behavior change and develop effective mechanisms for voicing their perspectives. Unfortunately, they are often not given opportunities to share their voice.

### ***The “MO Project Healthy Youth Leaders” Project Overview***

Through support from the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation and based on the success of the MO Project, CANFIT launched “*The MO Project Healthy Youth Leaders*” project in 2010 to strengthen youth leadership in advocating for environmental health change strategies. The project was conducted in coordination with the California School Health Centers Association (CSHC) at three school-based health centers in the Los Angeles area. The project included youth from John Marshall and Belmont High Schools (both through Asian Pacific Health Care Venture) and Manual Arts High School (through the Health Justice Council of LA’s Promise).

Over the course of a year, CANFIT trained 52 different youth from these three school-based health centers and worked in partnership with them to plan, support, and lead a MO Project online media contest. The contest utilizes a social media platform that allows youth to reach out to their peers throughout Los Angeles and statewide.

The *MO Healthy Youth Leaders* project consisted of a series of six hands-on, interactive, non-lecture style-training sessions. The series used social media and technology to teach youth how to advocate and recruit their peers to address cultural, environmental and/or socioeconomic barriers to health.

Based on our work with the *MO Healthy Youth Leaders* project, CANFIT recommends the following “Best Practices” to increase youth leadership in preventing obesity and diabetes and in promoting healthier environments in schools and communities:

1. Identify core youth and strong adult allies
2. Provide interactive trainings that shift youth from an individual to an environmental health framework
3. Use technology, media and online tools to engage youth
4. Host a contest to create an online community among youth

### **CANFIT’S BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

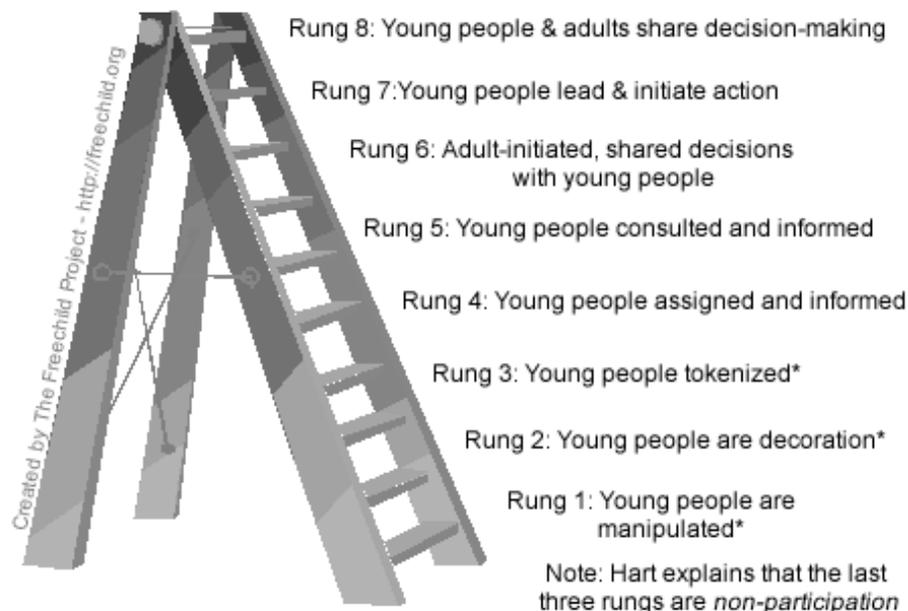
#### **1. Identify Core Youth & Strong Adult Allies**

The success of the *MO Project Healthy Youth Leaders* project was attributed to working with core groups of youth and strong adult allies. The youth groups were organized through school based health centers that engage young people through a variety of programs and services. The centers were a place for young people to go to after school and a great place to engage young people who want to get involved. Besides these centers, youth can be identified through a variety of different venues including other school-based programs, after school programs, community groups or faith-based groups. Often times young people thrive when they feel part of a project, group and/or team, so if you are starting a project, connect with existing groups first. If you are one of these programs, identify a few core youth and have them recruit others who may be interested.

*Genuine Youth Engagement vs. Tokenism*

When working with youth, CANFIT believes that it is important for adults to define roles clearly as part of the project design. At the same time, youth should be part of every step of the process in order to make sure youth voices are completely incorporated into the project. This kind of “Participatory Culture” exists in direct contradiction to more traditional models of education and youth/adult engagement. Over the past 20 years the field of education has started to incorporate more Project, Problem, and Inquiry-Based Learning techniques. It is important for adults who work with youth to recognize that approaches like this, which are less focused on a teacher passing down knowledge to students, are more effective in engaging youth. These methods can pose some challenges for adults who are accustomed to being the expert or leader. But true participatory interaction and media is what this generation of youth craves

**Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation**



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

-- and it is the element that will make health messages more authentic and engaging for other youth consumers. Youth-Adult partnerships can be thought of as a continuum:<sup>1</sup>

Youth can be integral members of the project design team. Here are some questions to help organizers identify how much participation they want from the youth:

- \* *What can/should the adults expect of the youth?*
- \* *What can/should the youth expect from the adults?*

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- \* Do youth messages need to be reviewed and approved by adults before distribution?
- \* Who gets to decide about distribution?
- \* What if the youth prefer a strategy or video with a message that is contrary to the adult mission?
- \* Which is more important: youth engagement or youth education? (If a youth creates a message with misinformation, who will inform them and how will that message be handled?)

This issue has a unique relevance to youth of color and those from disenfranchised backgrounds. While many youth are not consciously aware of a history of appropriation and media manipulation, they are suspicious of outsiders -- including adults.

*“In many of the places and with people with whom I work, there is a long history of trauma with the camera and in general with technology... If you look at film and video, you just have to look at the role mainstream media play in our communities. The images that are portrayed create negative stereotypes, but more insidiously, they promote passivity and powerlessness.”<sup>2</sup>*

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### CANFIT’s IDEAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST

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#### ARE YOU?

- Providing youth with opportunities to participate in the development of the project framework and implementation. “Creating youth ownership”?
- Recognizing the influence of youth involvement?
- Respecting and understanding today’s youth culture and considering youth trends?
- Listening to the youth’s point of view and implementing their ideas?
- Allowing youth to take the lead on program activities?
- Allowing space in the program to make changes if needed?
- Training youth as future youth trainers so that they can train their peers?
- Considering that youth are able to recruit other youth easily because they know youth culture/language?
- Supporting youth to create a friendly environment for other youth to participate?
- Valuing youth as leaders among their peers?
- Taking into consideration issues that are affecting youth in their community?
- Helping them to develop personal skills (confidence, communication, character) that will allow them to be involved and contribute to their community?
- Treating youth like partners rather than participants?
- Providing a safe working environment?
- Providing the youth with a sense of belonging which nurtures participation?
- Listening to youth concerns in a non-judgmental way?
- Using media and/or technology to inspire youth and get them more involved?

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<sup>2</sup> “Making Community: A Conversation with Thenmozhi Soundararajan from Lambert, Joe. “Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community.” Berkeley: Digital Diner Press, 2002.

## 2. Provide Interactive Trainings that Shift Youth from an Individual to an Environmental Health Framework

There are many existing projects, programs and clubs that focus on improving healthy behaviors, but very few that engage youth in understanding the environmental and systemic factors (e.g. lack of access to healthy food and open spaces/parks, and junk food marketing, etc) that contribute to health status. In an assessment survey completed by each of the three sites, we asked youth to describe the nutrition, physical activity and/or obesity prevention projects they were involved in, and found that all were individual health behavior based. We also found that none of the health behavior projects involved the entire school population.

Unfortunately in our work around the country, CANFIT has found that it is quite common for most schools, after school programs, youth agencies and youth themselves to not be aware of *how the environment in which one lives affects or sometimes even determines one's health*. Youth in low income communities and communities of color are often heavily impacted by unhealthy environments. Yet youth are often interested in learning how to live healthier lives, improve the health of their community and develop effective mechanisms for voicing their perspectives, but are usually not given opportunities to share their unique voice and perspective.

Through our MO Project interactive leadership sessions, we successfully engaged youth towards understanding this greater health message. And once they were trained, we used social media and new communication technologies as a “hook” for them to strategically inform their peers and get more youth involved. Here is a sample reference and activity we used from one of our interactive trainings:

### REFERENCES

- a. See CANFIT's ***How to Talk About Food & Physical Activity with Youth***

<http://canfit.org/pdf/HowToTalkAboutFoodandPhysicalActivity.pdf>

- b. **SAMPLE ACTIVITY** - Team Debate Challenge - (30 minutes)

Divide the audience into 2 groups

- Present the group with a particular issue to debate – *SAMPLE: We need/don't need more open space in our community.*
- One side will argue for the issue, the other will argue against
- Each group will work in teams of 4 to write down as many arguments for or against their issue as possible
- Each group will decide on the best arguments and choose a 1-2 representatives to present their argument to the big group
- After 15 minutes, Both groups will come back together
- ROUND 1 - each group representative(s) will be allowed to present their arguments to the entire group
- ROUND 2 - After presenting their arguments, both groups are welcome to counter each other's arguments that were stated
- ROUND 3 – Both group rep(s) will be allowed to make one final statement about their issue

- By applause, the winner of the debate will be determined.
- Lead a 10 minute discussion on why learning both sides of the issue is important and any other topics that they youth came up with during the debate. Discuss the “levels of change” involved and how simple issues can become policies that stakeholders could potentially support.

### 3. Use Technology, Media and Online Tools to Engage Youth

#### *Youth & Media*

It has been true for many generations: young people like to turn the radio up, to watch a little TV (or a lot) after school, to listen to their friends sing or rap at a school showcase -- in short, to consume media. So when we talk about meeting up with youth on their terms, in their environments, *youth-targeted media is a natural fit.*

#### *Youth Like to Consume Media*

Today’s youth have access to a wider variety of media than any previous generation. YouTube is the third most popular site on the Internet. However, contrary to popular belief, youth are not the primary source of this growth and are not giving up television in droves. Teen television viewing has actually gone up 6% in the last 5 years.<sup>3</sup> In many ways, youth do not differ that much from the media consumption habits of their elders.

What is different is how young people relate and respond to media. Whether television, print, radio, or Internet -- children and youth do not apply a critical lens to sources or messages that are targeted to them. In other words, it is easier for marketing from posters, music, television/radio and the Internet to elicit behavior changes in young people.

The Internet and social networks in particular, hold a special position for youth. “57% of teen social networkers said they looked to their online social network for advice, making them 63% more likely to do this than the typical social networker.”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, CANFIT believes that any youth project meant to inform or educate will have more impact if a social networking component is added.

#### *Youth Like to Create & Consume Media Created by Youth*

One reason the Internet and Web 2.0 have grown is that it gives viewers many opportunities to make and broadcast (share) media. Teenagers in particular, love this kind of peer-to-peer use of the internet. In 2006, the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 57% of teenagers who are online post their own “user-generated content” (UGC). This includes stories, photos, art, audio and video files.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “How Teens Use Media: A Nielsen report on the myths and realities of teen media trends.” June 2009  
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/16753035/Nielsen-Study-How-Teens-Use-Media-June-2009>

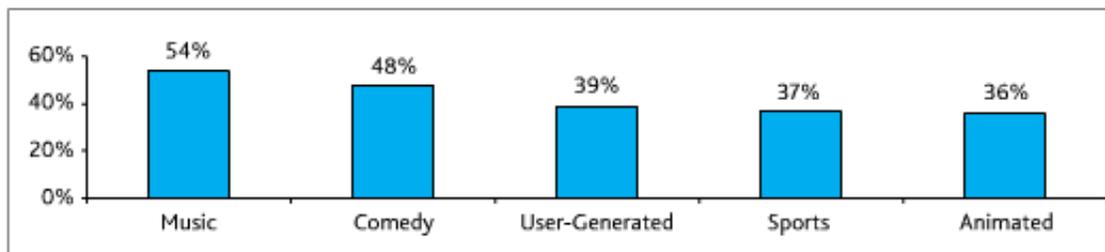
<sup>4</sup> “How Teens Use Media: A Nielsen report on the myths and realities of teen media trends.” June 2009  
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/16753035/Nielsen-Study-How-Teens-Use-Media-June-2009>

<sup>5</sup> “User-Generated Content,” Pew Internet & American Life Project, November 6, 2006.  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2006/UserGenerated-Content.aspx>

More recent research shows this number has increased substantially. “Content creation by teenagers continues to grow, with 64% of online teenagers ages 12 to 17 engaging in at least one type of content creation, up from 57% of online teens in 2004.”<sup>6</sup>

Although there is a perception that most of what youth watch online is illegally copied/shared/posted network media -- current trends are actually moving away from this model. In fact, the vast majority of video posted to YouTube and Vimeo is now UGC.

**Figure 7: Top Genres of Mobile Video Consumption by Reach—Mobile Video Viewers Ages 13–17—Q1 2009**



Source: The Nielsen Company

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Some call this aspect of Web 2.0 “Participatory Culture”.<sup>8</sup> What it means for those of us who work with youth is that their preference for media made FOR youth is shifting to more media made BY youth. This shift is also affecting the valuation that youth place on different sources. They prefer to talk to each other and leave adults out of the conversation entirely. So if we (adults) want to inject a dose of reality into conversations about healthy/unhealthy behavior and environments, we need to partner with youth to make the media that youth want and will watch.

#### 4. Host a Contest to Create an Online Community Among Youth

One of the goals of this project was to bring together a community of youth who are all working to make environmental health changes in their community. Our belief is that these types of youth communities will reach out to their peers in interactive ways (using social media and technology) to share what they are working on. Although the adults were the final authors of the written materials and guidelines, we consistently relied on the ideas of the youth in the conception and design of the project’s online contest.

Project youth ultimately decided that the contest would run for one month, be open to 13-18 year old youth statewide, and involve the creation of 90-second or less Public Service Announcement (PSA) type videos to make it easier for everyone to enter. The theme would be to ask youth to share their “MO’ Story” or “what are they doing to improve the health of their community”. They also decided the

<sup>6</sup> Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill “Teens and Social Media” December 19, 2007

<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Teens-and-Social-Media.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> “How Teens Use Media: A Nielsen report on the myths and realities of teen media trends.” June 2009

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/16753035/Nielsen-Study-How-Teens-Use-Media-June-2009>

<sup>8</sup> Reilly & Robison “Extending Media Literacy: How Young People Remix and Transform Media to Serve Their Own Interests” [http://www.youthmediareporter.org/print\\_journals/YMR\\_PrintJournal0708.pdf](http://www.youthmediareporter.org/print_journals/YMR_PrintJournal0708.pdf)

details, prizes (1<sup>st</sup> prize would be an iPad), how voting would take place and the judges. The contest would be hosted at [www.moproject.com](http://www.moproject.com).

Much of the benefit of youth-made content is not just for the audience, but also for the authors. Encouraging youth to explore issues by making their own User Generated Content educates the youth media maker themselves. Even if the final product is not uploaded or is only viewed by a few people, youth engagement is still taking place.

Online Media contests are effective methods for engaging youth. Specifically they can be used to:

- Increase awareness among youth and adults about a specific issue
- Create and build a network of youth interested in a specific issue & making media about it
- Increase understanding of that issue (through completion of media projects)
- Increase youth confidence
- Increase youth leadership skills
- Increase opportunities for adults to mentor and support youth
- Create media that can be used for further youth engagement and leadership opportunities

### *Contest Protocols*

There are several ways to run an online contest. Overall, it's important to first design goals, rules and guidelines that are fair, comprehensive and that leave room for changes. In many states, specific laws with punitive damages regulate contests. For this reason, a lawyer should always review guidelines. It's also a good idea to consult with an agency that has experience with running contests.

Here are some key questions when designing a Youth Media Contest:

- \* Who is responsible for the design? How can a genuine youth voice be included?
- \* Will the youth have access to the technology required to enter the contest?
- \* Are there reasons why the youth might be uncomfortable with using the equipment?
- \* Will they feel ownership over the media/the methods/their product?
- \* Can the adults accommodate technology the youth already have? (For example, can youth shoot videos on their cell phones?)
- \* What are the ways in which youth authorship might be co-opted or manipulated by adults?
- \* Will the available technology support genuine youth participation or could they be discouraged and try to get an adult to finish the job for them?
- \* Are the standards age-appropriate for the youth who will enter?

There are several web design companies that specialize in running contests.<sup>9</sup> Here are some considerations to using a contest design company:

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.filmaka.com>  
<http://www.votigo.com>

- Experience with what can go right (and what can go wrong)
- Specific language & documentation for contest guidelines, rules, releases and copyright issues
- Suggestions and networks for contest promotion
- Can easily incorporate a social network with the contest
- Contest plug ins, banners, widgets, and other elements for web 2.0 cross promotion on sites like MySpace and Facebook (may require additional fees)
- Data collection for your review when the contest has finished
- Archiving of contest entries
- Will sometimes waive fees or provide discounted rates for social marketing projects or contests for youth
- Depending on your budget, can be cost-prohibitive
- Requires staff to review detailed contract -- and hold the company to the details of the contract
- Most providers will host site on their own servers. Without a monthly maintenance fee after the contest is done, site and it's media content will eventually be discontinued

### *Lower Budget Options*

Several successful contests have been run on [www.Flicker.com](http://www.Flicker.com) using tags. This method has been used with less success to date on [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com). Basically the contest organizers set up a user site on the service (Flicker or YouTube) with a description of the contest, the deadline, and the requirements for entry. The main requirement is that users upload their work on their own user site and then add a tag like "THEONECONTEST2011" to their work. The contest organizers search for this tag and judge any entries that come up in the search. This results in little to no cost for the sponsoring organization. It also allows the organization to use the existing social networking features of the service. Several factors to consider with this method:

- Users who forget to tag, don't understand tagging or mis-tag will never be seen by contest organizers
- There is little to no data collection
- There is no way to verify the age or location of the people who enter the contest
- Some services (especially YouTube) require all users to sign a TOS (terms of service) that gives the service rights to the material. This can be problematic if the sponsoring organization intends on using entries for messaging or outreach.

Having a social network component to the contest website allows youth to engage more directly with each other. Most importantly, it also allows youth with interest to sign up for the community without having to create a contest entry. At the end of the contest, organizers have key data on the youth who signed up including Name, Age, Email, Zip Code, and any other elements they ask for. (This is information that should also be collected at the workshops and other outreach events.) With this information, adult organizers can engage more effectively with the youth.

Via Twitter, Facebook and email blasts to the youth, contest organizers can get out information to the group. They can clarify confusion showing up in the contest entries, reinforce deadlines/extend deadlines, or even announce additional events. This relationship can continue even after the contest has ended.

### Awarding the Winners

One of the benefits of a contest is that the youth-made media can be used for subsequent outreach and activism around the contest issues. It's helpful for youth to know what they should be aiming for. In the case of the MO Project, the media winners will be used to help support community and legislative changes to promote environmental health. Because these winning videos will be used in partnership with youth, the message is actually more important than the media quality. Contest organizers decided early on that we would rather have videos and posters that said something powerful than media that was polished and empty.

A judging matrix was created to help the youth create their entries and vote on their peers, and also to guide the adult judges as they picked the winners.

<b>Lessons Learned: Judging Matrix</b>		
	Try Again	It's A Winner!
Message 35%	Video <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Doesn't include one of the required themes*</li> <li>- Connection to theme doesn't work or make sense</li> <li>- Too many themes attempted</li> </ul>	Video/Poster <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Includes one or more of the required themes*</li> <li>- Connection to theme is clear.</li> <li>- Project helps viewer to understand the theme better.</li> </ul>
Practical Skills 25%	Video is poorly put together. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bad selection of shots/bad shots.</li> <li>- Feels jumpy.</li> <li>- Sound is too soft/too loud.</li> </ul>	Video is well put together. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excellent selection of shots/beautiful shots.</li> <li>- Length of cuts is good.</li> <li>- Transitions are smooth.</li> <li>- Sounds great!</li> </ul>
Entertainment Value 25%	Video <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boring</li> <li>- Confusing</li> <li>- Seen it Before</li> </ul>	Video is fun to watch. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keeps your interest.</li> <li>- Tells a story.</li> <li>- Funny or Touching</li> <li>- Original/Creative</li> </ul>
Personal Reaction 15%	Video <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not touch me or create any kind of emotional reaction.</li> </ul>	Video <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inspired me to want to learn more about the issue or take action.</li> </ul>

Judges can be recruited from a variety of sources and should reflect the diversity of the youth targeted. Judges can be experts at media but should also include experts in the issues at hand. Youth judges can also help to balance out the panel. Some contest website designers offer automated judging systems. If not, there are plenty of websites that allow users to generate surveys at little to no cost. <sup>10</sup>

While judges are completing their rankings based on a list of finalists/potential winners, it's crucial for contest organizers to start the process of validating the contestants. For the MO Project we had asked

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.webmonkey.com> , <http://www.wufoo.com>

youth to identify an “Adult Ally” early in the process that would help them to fill out and notarize certain documents in case they were selected.

Awards ceremonies are public events and involve many moving parts. Because of this, the more elements can be simply handled by contest organizers, the better. For example, it is possible to get prizes donated. However, if no one in the organization has a direct relationship to the companies, it’s better to budget to simply buy the prizes directly.

Press releases should also go out to announce the Contest Winners and/or Award Ceremony. Organizers should seek a celebrity or local politician to hand out the awards as this can increase event publicity and help to get the message out. It also serves to inspire the youth to take further action.

*“Authentic representation and ‘voice’ are key concepts in the belief that the ideas and perspectives of young people contribute to a healthy society. Youth media provides young people with a means to present themselves to their peers, their community, and the world. It offers sophisticated skills to creatively craft messages and strategically reach audiences. Youth media advocates believe that young people can play a critical role in confronting social concerns that impact their lives and communities. The skills and knowledge provided by youth media programs stress fundamental skills that inspire youth toward more active, capable, and confident civic engagement.”<sup>11</sup>*

## **Conclusion**

At CANFIT, we meet people where they are. We understand youth culture and know how to bring healthy eating and physical activity into the lives of young people. This Best Practice Report is a way to share our *MO Project Healthy Youth Leaders* model and help youth serving organizations effectively engage youth as we continue our fight together to improve the health of youth and communities.

## **About CANFIT**

Since 1993, CANFIT has been at the heart of the movement to improve healthy eating and physical activity environments for adolescents in low income communities and communities of color. From grassroots to government, we work with community-based and youth-serving organizations and youth to identify local solutions and support the development of culturally competent policy and practices.

CANFIT primarily focuses on working to support low-income, African-American, American Indian, Latino/Hispanic, Asian American and Pacific Islander adolescents. Many of these historically underserved populations have limited access to affordable, healthy foods and safe places for physical activity.

CANFIT offers hands-on, culturally resonant technical assistance and training tailored to meet community needs. Our unique approach to partnering with communities and youth builds capacity and leadership, while helping to advance sustainable change in low income communities and communities of color.

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<sup>11</sup> Tyner & Mokund, “Mapping the Field: A Survey of Youth Media Organizations in the United States” A Closer Look: Media Arts 2003, Case Studies from NAMAC’s Youth Media Initiative, 2003

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Survey Websites <http://www.webmonkey.com>, <http://www.wufoo.com>