Executive Summary

A Participatory Governance Program Model for a National Young Women’s Initiative
– by Girls for Gender Equity

Girls for Gender Equity
October 2016
The New York City Council’s Young Women’s Initiative (YWI) is an intergenerational, participatory governance planning process. Community advocates, policy experts and the Young Women’s Advisory Council were charged with determining the needs for programming, policy change, data collection, and areas for long-term research that would improve the lives of young women of color (cis and trans) and gender-nonconforming young persons in the city of New York. The focus of YWI includes:

- Identifying the needs of young women and girls of color ages 12–24, while being mindful that intervention may reach a wider age range.

- Spotlighting issues experienced by women and girls of color, knowing that when inequity is disaggregated by race and gender, disparities in outcomes in New York City are overwhelmingly concentrated in communities of color; and

- Embracing an inclusive framework around gender, beyond the gender binary, and ensuring that transgender women and gender-non-conforming young women are also centered in this work.

YWI seeks to build a lasting blueprint for moving policies, transforming systems, and investing in the future of young women and girls of color.
In September 2015, the New York City Council convened stakeholders across the City, including but not limited to community-based organizations, advocates, policy experts, and young women of color (cis and trans) themselves. Together they made recommendations to secure the futures of women and girls across the five boroughs.

Aligned with the Council’s commitment to participatory governance and knowing that young women and girls of color are experts in their own lives, the City Council created a Young Women’s Advisory Council (YWAC), which played a key advisory role during the process.

The City Council called upon three leaders for racial and gender justice, Joanne N. Smith, Founder and Executive Director of Girls for Gender Equity; Ana Oliveira, CEO of the New York Women’s Foundation; and Dr. Danielle Moss Lee, CEO of the YWCA of New York City to serve as Initiative Co-Chairs. In partnership with City Council staff, the YWI Co-Chairs provided the vision, structure and framework for YWI.

The Initiative staff and Co-Chairs formed a Steering Committee of grassroots advocates, policy experts, advocates and leaders of YWAC, which established a Working Group process to develop recommendations for improving the lives of young women and girls of color.

Members of the Steering Committee led five Working Groups representing key systems of inequities that we are working to transform: Health, Economic & Workforce Development, Community Support & Opportunity, Education, Anti-Violence, and Criminal Justice. (New York City Council, 2016).

The Young Women’s Initiative (YWI) is the first intergenerational, participatory government-led initiative to be fully dedicated to improving the lives of cisgender, transgender girls and young women of color and gender nonconforming youth. The seven-month initiative (September 2015 to March 2016) was charged to determine what future innovation in programming, data collection, policy, and public/private partnerships was needed to combat gender inequity and racism.

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in New York City. Girls for Gender Equity worked with the Speaker of the New York City Council Melissa Mark-Viverito’s staff from the Community Engagement Division as the principal organizer of The Young Women’s Advisory Council (YWAC), and through a public/private partnership with the New York Women’s Foundation to develop a program that created conditions for young women and girls to critically shape and inform YWI policy recommendations on Health, Economic & Workforce Development, Community Support & Opportunity, Education, Anti-Violence, and Criminal Justice.

**Young Women’s Advisory Council**

The Young Women’s Advisory Council (YWAC) was convened as expert participants informing the New York City’s Young Women’s Initiative. The crux of the Initiative is centered on the lived experiences of young women and girls of color navigating the systemic racist and sexist policies and practices of institutions, and the absence of trauma-informed approaches. In an effort to maintain the integrity of the initiative, Girls for Gender Equity, collaborated with community leaders, organizers and allies from the five boroughs of NYC to recruit 23 young people as the Young Women’s Advisory Council.

The Speaker’s staff from the Community Engagement Division worked in partnership with GGE staff, YWAC Co-Chairs Gloria Malone, Miss Cherno Biko, Nala Simone Toussaint and Amanda Matos, as well as the leading young women within YWI to create a responsive, powerful and informative youth council model.

Participation and leadership of cis and trans young women and girls of color has been integral to the Young Women’s Initiative. The 23 members of the Young Women’s Advisory Council participated in the 5 issue-based working groups (Health, Economic & Workforce Development, Community Support & Opportunity, Education, Anti-Violence, and Criminal Justice)³ and were part of the YWI Steering Committee.

As a further commitment to fully include all young women of color within the gender spectrum, space was intentionally created to support and lift the voices of trans and gender nonconforming youth within the initiative. For example, a trans council was led by trans young women. Though initially manifesting as a distinct group, the council co-chairs altered their strategy – convening separately on an as-needed basis as
the YWI program progressed. The involvement of young women, from YWAC to issue group work spaces, critically ensured that the voices and experiences of young women were not only lifted in traditionally adult-held spaces, but were also actively informing adults throughout the initiative.

**Centering Trans & Undocumented Voices**

Recognizing the underrepresentation of trans and undocumented voices informing the YWI process, youth activists worked alongside Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) and adult advocates to push for more inclusive spaces. This manifested in action both within and outside the initiative.

With support from GGE, the young women within the initiative created a two-pronged model to address the underrepresentation of trans and undocumented voices. Internally, youth YWI organizers actively widened the lens of gender identity in both framework and analysis during policy development. Externally, youth activists created and held a dedicated space for underrepresented voices to assess policy proposals. The strategy to reach out to trans and gender nonconforming youth outside of the initiative allowed for NYC based youth who were not connected to organizations to offer input. These spaces and strategies were led by trans youth activists and critically shaped YWI’s final recommendations. Final recommendations can be found at [www.shewillbe.nyc](http://www.shewillbe.nyc)

**Program Evaluation**

**Focus and Goal**

Girls for Gender Equity seeks insight on three main areas of program evaluation: codification of the Young Women’s Advisory Council (YWAC) program model: an assessment of the program from participating young women; and sharing our best practices for implementing YWAC nationally.

**Methodology**

Peer-reviewed articles, government agency reports, and facilitation handbooks were the bulk of literature consulted. Interviews were
conducted with YWAC members and their co-chairs, resulting in useful information further supplemented by responses from a diagnostic survey, mid-point survey and a following final survey. Two focus groups were conducted with trans and undocumented young women to help further evaluate policy development. Data collected from both focus groups informed programmatic and evaluative pieces of this report.

Limitations & Assumptions
While undergoing research, some limitations were encountered. The evaluation of the YWAC model is based on three sources of data; further formative assessments were not able to be conducted, reducing the variety of collected information for analysis. Despite these setbacks, the research design evaluates two areas that are least affected by time constraints and focuses on GGE’s most immediate needs: codification and youth feedback.

6 Step Social Work with Analysis Model
The six step sequential model is broken into three thematic blocks defined by key facilitation methods outlined in GGE’s pedagogic strategy: shared-ownership of knowledge [steps 1 & 2], scaffolding power [steps 3, 4 & 5] and meta-analysis [step 6].

Step 1 Experience as Expertise: As an introduction into the topic of discussion, participants choose how they want to engage with the discussion. Generally open in focus, participants are invited to “show up” in the YWAC space by sharing their own personal experience and knowledge on an identified discussion topic.

Step 2 Make Space, Create Space: Comprised of two actions, this step encourages participants to (a) analyze their shared experiences and (b) highlight important ideas related to the discussion (i.e. allyship and privilege). Participants note the nuances within their shared experiences and are mindful of the voices within the room, to both recognize collective strengths and identify areas that may need more support.

Step 3 Knowledge is Power: This step acts as a point of contextualization. Adding onto established knowledge and experience, participants are introduced to new information to frame – and further
unpack the discussion topic at hand. Terms and concepts are defined to anchor discussion. Participants then consider externalities and other notable details.

**Step 4 Critical Thinking Framework:** Analysis takes hold as participants engage in programming geared – to strengthen and support critical problem – solving, solution-oriented evaluation and conceptual thinking. Typically initiated through a problem statement, participants are prompted to develop strategies and an action plan to address issues raised previously. This outlines key actions that eventually build a critical thinking framework.

**Step 5 Experiential Learning:** Experiential learning opportunities anchor acquired problem-solving skills. Typically done through small group work, participants actively apply what they have...
experienced as young women of color by simulating a real-world scenario. Participants are tasked with solving a new issue by using the framework established previously in step 4.

**Step 6 Reflect on the Journey:** The final step is a point of reflection. Participants gather collectively to debrief on their learning journey. Though check-in moments happen throughout the model, step 6 is more of a structured process that unpacks the learning experience. YWAC members are prompted to build community through lifting challenges, points of contention and offering recommendations.

**Impact**

**YWAC Program Outcomes**

During the seven-month duration of YWI, different types of assessments were conducted to evaluate the YWAC progress and identify gaps that may need further development. After administering interviews; check-ins; and qualitative surveys to youth and staff, some key themes emerged in reported responses, highlighting successes of the model, as well as, areas that need more support.

**Strengths**

**I. Community Building**

Responses articulated community building as a major strength of the program – noting empowerment and respect as essential ingredients to strong programming. Specifically, the young women felt supported by each other; their co-chairs; and their adult advocates throughout YWAC meetings.

**II. Leadership Development**

Most of the goals the young women wanted to accomplish through YWI centered on learning, organizing and developing skills connected to leadership, particularly through the lens of policy and organizing.

**III. Staff Responsiveness**

When asked about other programming strengths, YWAC members
stated staff responsiveness, specifically towards raised concerns and requests, was another crucial building block to success. As an intergenerational approach to programming, the YWI co-chair, Joanne Smith, would sit in on some of the YWAC meetings and debrief weekly with the YWAC Coordinator in order to hear where she can support the process for young people. She would speak with adult YWI co-chairs directly and as a group and share some of the concerns and better strategies for working with youth. Youth decided that they wanted to co-create the working group meeting agenda and present the issues as they experience them to the working groups so working group co-chairs agreed and made more time and room for the youth to be seen and heard.

**Areas That Need More Support**

**I. Time Constraints and Management**
A number of YWAC members commented on the strict time line of the initiative. Only spanning seven months, many felt a possible extension of the initiative’s lifespan and better management of time would have benefited the program.

**II. Elevating Youth & Trans Voices**
Survey and interview data also showed YWAC members and staff wanted more involvement of trans and undocumented young people. Though changes were made throughout the duration of the process to address this concern, the young women felt more should be done, especially within issue groups and spaces that were predominantly held by adults.

**III. Disability Rights**
Although we reached out to local disability rights organizations, only two people identified as having disabilities. YWAC was not successful with attracting and learning from the expertise of youth with disabilities. YWI co-chairs and City Council researched and incorporated data and recommendations to address the needs of youth with disabilities especially school. A number of participants identified as mentally ill. People with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty because poverty operates as a cause and consequence of disability. Children with disabilities enter the juvenile legal system at 5-6 times the rate of youth who do not have disabilities, with 65% of boys and 75% of girls in juvenile detention having at least one mental illness, and
up to 85% of children in juvenile detention having at least one disability; and 55% of male state prisoners and 73% of female state prisoners have a mental health condition, with just 1 in 3 state prisoners and 1 in 6 jail inmates receiving treatment for their illness since being admitted.6

IV. Recruiting Native American girls to participate
YWAC was also deliberate about recruiting Native American girls and young women but again was not successful with securing Native American representation within the membership base.

Additional Program Strengths
Data collected highlighted some key characteristics of YWAC’s programmatic strengths:

HR Management
Having a dedicated staff member coordinate and plan policies and procedures before the start of programming enhances stability within the program, while also reducing burdens during moments of crisis or times of increased activity.

Flexibility and Responsiveness
Making the program agenda flexible enough to accommodate changing needs and requests of the space will enhance participation and sense of community of the space. Increased responsiveness of staff creates the conditions for participants to feel supported and heard.

Safe(R) Spaces
Perhaps the most important consideration, the provision of safer and supportive spaces is key to the YWAC model. This was emphasized continuously throughout the review of literature, programming and assessment data. Safe(R) spaces are the foundation to movement building, especially when it engages traditionally marginalized communities. When participants feel safer and supported in these spaces there is a deeper connection and trust developed between youth and the issue; youth and adult advocates; and youth and peers.

Policy Outcomes
The pioneering YWI connected community-based organizations, grassroots activists and women and girls of color to discuss short,

6 http:/ /www.forharriet.com/2016/09/the-vision-for-black-lives-is.html#ixzz4N5SUMi6S6
medium and long-term priorities to enhance New York City’s policies, structures and services for girls. This manifested in three key actions:

I. New York City Council (2016). New York City Young Women’s Initiative: Report & Recommendations (2016)\(^7\)

The groundbreaking work and organizing that progressed during YWI produced a list of recommendations on key issue areas for City Council to consider. With YWI work informing the process, City Council released a report that outlined important findings and tangible solutions to address gender inequity in New York City.

II. Young Women’s Advisory Council 2.0

YWAC was highlighted as one of the most successful components of YWI, City Council pledged to continue including young women and girls in the decision making process. With support from City Council and key partners in the Mayor’s office, and with support from The Fund and City Council Young Women’s Initiative discretionary funds, Girls for Gender Equity is leading a second iteration of the YWAC program.

III. Building Power NYC Map\(^8\)

Building Power NYC Map is a pilot tool used to map the services available to cis, trans and gender-nonconforming young women and girls of color in New York City. Its goal is to support individual, organizational and New York City Council access to knowledge about services that exist and intentionally center the needs of young women and girls of color. All information shared was self-reported by agencies. The map findings only reflect the 80 organizations that completed the mapping survey and the 197 locations although not all participated in YWI. The tool is aimed to be a starting point for the City Council to fully develop the 4th overarching recommendation from YWI report, “Work towards building a cross agency “one-stop” youth-centered digital platform that can support youth with information relevant to a service they are receiving, function as a searchable tool for accessing services in neighborhoods and serve as a digital case manager.”\(^9\)

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\(^8\) ibid 2

\(^9\) ibid 3
Appendix A
Steering Committee Members

New York City Council Speaker
Melissa Mark-Viverito, Young Women’s Initiative

Ana Oliveira
YWI Co-Chair, President & CEO New York Women’s Fdn

Joanne N. Smith
YWI Co-Chair, Founder & ED Girls for Gender Equity

Dr. Danielle Moss Lee
YWI Co-Chair President & CEO YWCA NYC

Maya Wiley Counsel to Mayor Bill de Blasio

Lilliam Barrios-Paoli,
Chair of Board NYC Health & Hospitals

NYC Council Member
Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, Chair-Comm. on Finance YWI Steering Comm

NYC Council Member
Laurie Cumbo, Chair Comm. on Women’s Issues YWI Steering Comm

NYC Council Member
Darlene Mealy, Chair Comm. on Civil Rights YWI Steering Comm

NYC Council Member
Elizabeth Crowley, Chair - Committee on Fire & Criminal Justice YWI Steering Comm.

Monique Morris
YWI Steering Committee
Co-founder National Black Women’s Justice Institute, Inc.

Amanda Matos
Co-Founder & ED The WomanHOOD Project Young Women’s Advisory Council Co-chair

Gloria Malone
Young Women’s Advisory Council Co-chair Reproductive Justice Organizer Teen Mom NYC

Carol Robles-Roman
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ED Legal Momentum, The Women’s Legal Defense Fund

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Soros Justice Fellow

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Nadia Lopez
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Health Co-chair Transgender Services Specialist HMI
Appendix A

Steering Committee Members

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Professor Icahn  
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Alicia Guevara  
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Angie Kamath  
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Federation Protestant  
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Heather McGee  
YWI Steering  
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Appendix A
Principal Organizers

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Laura Popa Project Manager YWI Deputy Chief of Staff for Legislation and Policy at New York City Council

Sasha Ahuja Principal Project Manager YWI Deputy Director Policy and Innovation

Latonia McKinney Finance Director at New York City Council & Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito

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Milo Inglehart Project Management Junior Policy Analyst at New York City Council

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Gloria Malone Young Women’s Advisory Council Co-chair Reproductive Justice Organizer Teen Mom NYC

Young Women’s Advisory Council Program Model
Appendix A
Principal Organizers

YWAC Members Celebrating the End of the YWI Planning Process