

Executive Summary



A Participatory Governance Program Model for a National Young Women's Initiative

— by Girls for Gender Equity



October 2016

Executive Summary

Young Women's Initiative

The New York City Council's Young Women's Initiative (YWI) is the nation's first intergenerational, participatory governance planning process.¹ 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 cisgender and transgender (cis and trans) young women of color and gender nonconforming young people 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 people 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 New York City over the long-term.²

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 cis and trans young women of color 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 partnered with Girls for Gender Equity to create 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, City Council members 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.³ (New York City Council, 2016).

The Young Women's Initiative (YWI) is the nation's first intergenerational, participatory governance initiative to be fully dedicated to improving the lives of cisgender, transgender girls and young women of color and gender nonconforming young people. 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 in New York City. Girls for Gender Equity collaborated with staff from the Community Engagement Division of the New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito's office to organize the Young Women's Advisory Council. Through a public-private partnership with the New York Women's Foundation, all partners developed a program that created conditions

for young women and girls to critically shape and inform the YWI 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 (GGE), 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 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 young people 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, 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 young people 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, which can be found at www.shewillbe.nyc⁴

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 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 Model⁵

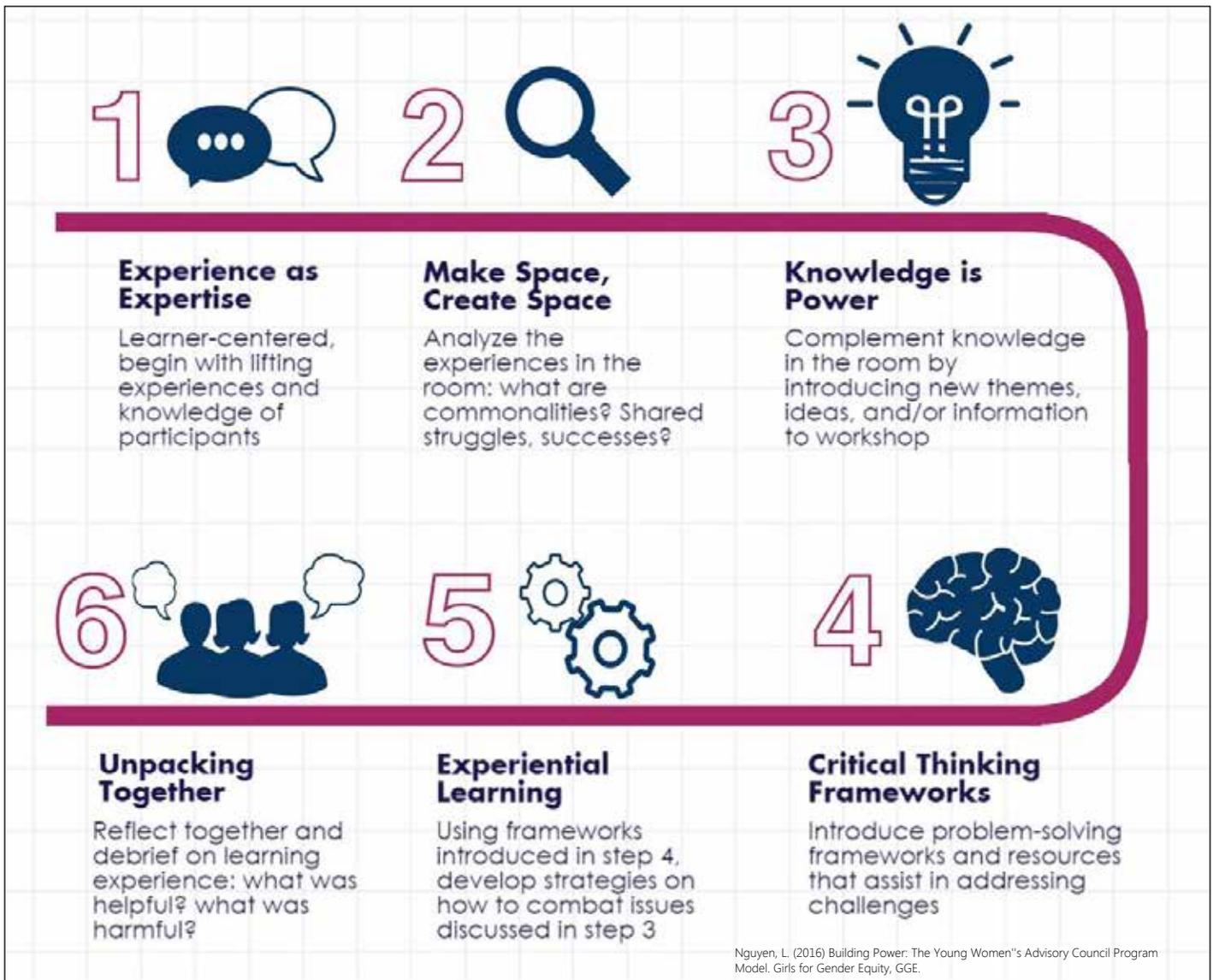
The six step sequential model is broken into three thematic blocks defined by key facilitation methods outlined in GGE's pedagogic strategy: shared-ownership of knowledge [steps 1 & 2], scaffolding power [steps 3, 4 & 5] and meta-analysis [step 6].

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 Co-chairs in order to hear where she can support the process for young people. She would speak with adult working group 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 recommendation development process. 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. As outlined in *Discrimination Against Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students in New York State* (Frederico, 2015) nationally, a staggering 41 percent of people who are transgender will attempt suicide at least once. The vast majority (almost 75 percent) of transgender students report being verbally harassed at school in the past year, and one-in-three have been physically assaulted. More than half have avoided going to school due to harassment, and one-in-six (15 percent) have left school altogether. One-in-five transgender people experience homelessness during their lives, and in New York City, the average age that a transgender person becomes homeless is only 13-and-a-half.

III. Disability Rights

Although GGE 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 in 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

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

YWI connected community-based organizations, grassroots activists and women and girls of color to discuss short, medium and long-term priorities to enhance New York City's policies, structures and services for girls. **This manifested in four key actions:**

I. The New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito announced a \$20 million dollar commitment over the next 2 years to fund important programs recommended by the Young Women's Initiative.

II. 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. The report can be found at www.shewillbe.nyc

III. 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 Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and key partners in the Mayor's office, and with support from The NYC Fund for Girls & Young Women of Color and City Council Young Women's Initiative discretionary funds, Girls for Gender Equity is leading a second iteration of the YWAC program to Establish a standing Young Women's Initiative and Young Women's Advisory Council to monitor implementation of recommendations and continue to build new areas of focus. footnote.⁸

IV. Building Power NYC Map⁹

Building Power NYC Map is a pilot tool used to map the services available to cis, trans young women and girls and gender nonconforming young people 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 and gender nonconforming youth of color. All information shared was self-reported by YWI participant organizations. 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."¹⁰

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
YWI Steering Committee
ED Legal Momentum,
The Women's Legal Defense Fund



Nala Toussaint YWAC
Trans Young Women of Color Advisory Council
PrEP Specialist Callen-Lorde Community Health Center



Andrea Ritchie
Anti-Violence Co-Chair
Soros Justice Fellow



Rukia Lumumba
Anti-Violence Co-Chair
Director of Youth Programs CASES



Cidra Sebastien
Education Co-chair
Associate ED The Brotherhood/Sister Sol



Nadia Lopez
Education Co-chair
Principal Mott Hall Bridges Academy



Octavia Lewis
Health Co-chair
Transgender Services Specialist HMI

Appendix A

Steering Committee Members



Dr. Angela Diaz
Health Co-chair
Professor Icahn
School of



Dillonna Lewis
Community Supports
Co-chair ED Welfare
Rights Initiative



Lindsay Rosenthal
Community Supports
Co-chair Fellow
Vera Institute



Alicia Guevara
Econ & Workforce Dev.
Co-chair tED Year Up



Angie Kamath
Econ & Workforce Dev.
Co-chair ED Per
Scholas



Jennifer Jones Austin
YWI Steering
Committee ED
Federation Protestant
Welfare Agencies



Heather McGee
YWI Steering
Committee ED Demos



Stephanie Gendell
Data Co-chair
Associate ED for
Policy & Gov. Relations
Citizen's Committee
for Children of NY



Kimberlé Crenshaw
Data Co-chair
ED African American
Policy Forum



Opal Tometi
YWI Steering
Committee ED Black
Alliance for Just
Immigration /#BLM



Jessica Gonzales-Rojas
YWI Steering
Committee
ED National Latina
Institute for
Reproductive Health



Miriam Yeung
YWI Steering
Committee
ED National Asian
Pacific American
Women's Forum



Jamilah Lemieux
Communications
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Ebony



Haydee Morales
Health Co-Chair
Executive Director
Casita Maria
Center for Arts and
Education



Farah Tanis
Anti-Violence Co-Chair
Co-Founder
Black Women's
Blueprint



Melanie Hartzog
YWI Steering
Committee Executive
Director Children's
Defense Fund



Hannah Giorgis
Communications
Co-chair
Journalist BuzzFeed

Appendix A

Principal Organizers



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



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



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



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



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



Mary Tek
Policy Innovation Projects Coordinator at New York City Council



Danielle Porcaro
Project Manager Young Women's Advisory Council Community Liaison New York City Council



Amy Varghese
Press Strategy Deputy Press Secretary New York City Council



Jazmin Chavez
Social Media and Community Manager at New York City Council & Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito



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



Nala Toussaint YWAC Trans Young Women of Color Advisory Council PrEP Specialist Callen-Lorde Community Health Center



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

Appendix A

Principal Organizers



YWI Steering Committee First Meeting



YWAC Members Celebrating the End of the YWI Planning Process

Endnotes

Executive Summary

1 A participatory governance process is a governance theory which puts emphasis on true democratic engagement through deliberative practices. Participatory governance seeks to deepen citizen participation in the governmental process by inclusions of individuals impacted by governance and the examination of assumptions and practices of the traditional view that generally hinders the realization of a genuine participatory democracy.

2 New York City Council (2016). New York City Young Women's Initiative: Report & Recommendations. Retrieved from <http://www.shewillbe.nyc/YWI-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf>

3 New York City Council (2016). New York City Young Women's Initiative: Report & Recommendations. Retrieved from <http://www.shewillbe.nyc/YWI-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf> p.7-8

The Steering Committee led five Working Groups in total:

- Health

Grounded in a "social determinants of health" framework, the Health Working Group examined available data on disparities in health outcomes, focused on gaps in coverage for basic healthcare and highlighted programs that are reaching the highest need groups of young women and girls.

- Economic & Workforce Development

Focused on how economic mobility and preparation for entering the workforce need to be fully integrated in the school setting, while expanding options for young women and girls who have left the school system.

- Community Support & Opportunity Embracing a "whole girl" approach, the Community Support & Opportunity Working Group examined the issues of young women and girls in deep poverty – overwhelmingly those of color - and specifically focused on how policy change translates into implementation.

- Education

Focusing on the education of young women and girls in the most inclusive sense, the Education Working Group examined how shifts in school climate and curricula, as well as the expansion of after school and out-of-school services, could enhance educational outcomes for young women and girls.

- Anti-Violence & Criminal Justice

The Anti-Violence & Criminal Justice Working Group focused on reducing young women and girls' interactions with the criminal justice system, increasing safety and respect for their rights and dignity during police interactions and while in custody, and reshaping responses to violence so they uphold young women's survivorship, agency and resilience.

4 New York City Council (2016). New York City Young Women's Initiative: Report & Recommendations. Retrieved from <http://www.shewillbe.nyc/YWI-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf>

5 Refer to page 30 for a detailed description.

6 For Harriet (9/29/2016). The Vision for Black Lives Is Incomplete Without Disability Solidarity. Retrieved from [Http://www.forharriet.com/2016_09_01_archive.html#ixzz4ObsC4swT](http://www.forharriet.com/2016_09_01_archive.html#ixzz4ObsC4swT) (10/04/2016)

7 New York City Council (2016). New York City Young Women's Initiative: Report & Recommendations. Retrieved from <http://www.shewillbe.nyc/YWI-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf>

8 New York City Council (2016). New York City Young Women's Initiative: Report & Recommendations Retrieved from <http://www.shewillbe.nyc/YWI-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf> p. 8

9 Building Power NYC Mapping Site <http://buildingpowernyc.org/about.html>

10 New York City Council (2016). New York City Young Women's Initiative: Report & Recommendations Retrieved from <http://www.shewillbe.nyc/YWI-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf> p. 8



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