



2023-2026 Strategic Plan

JULY 2023

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Strategic Planning Process Overview	6
Findings from the Field	9
Perspectives on Field Needs and Gaps	9
Staffing and professionalizing the field	9
Funding for programs, collaboration and systems engagement	10
Equity practices across the field	11
Visibility and recognition for the field	12
SOWA's Role and Focus	14
Serve as a convener to support cross-program and provider collaboration	15
Advocacy and elevating the visibility of the field on a statewide level	15
Support and promote practices to center community voice in advocacy and program design	16
Provide professional learning and quality supports that are accessible on all levels	17
Improve program funding through intermediary grant making and educating funders about more equitable grant making	18
Highlight and address gaps in equity and inclusion statewide	19
SOWA's Internal Equity Culture & Staff Needs	20
Refined Strategy	20
Increased Staffing, Professional Development and Compensation	20
Cultivating Cultural Norms/Practices	21
Articulating SOWA's Theory of Change	22
Recommendations and Strategic Priorities	24
Strategic Priority 1: Increase Equitable Funding for the Field	24
Strategic Priority 2: Strengthen Collective Impact and Community-Driven Solutions through a Formalized Convener Role	25
Strategic Priority 3: Strengthen Data and Evaluation Capacity	26
Strategic Priority 4: Invest in Staff, Organizational Culture and Sustainability	27
Appendix	28
Appendix A: Strategic Planning Core Team Members	28
Appendix B: Strategic Planning Process Participants	28
Appendix C: Sample Listening Session Tool	30
Appendix D: Interview Protocol	35

Executive Summary

Dear Community,

We are proud to share our Strategic Plan for 2023 to 2026. This plan is deeply informed by our community and supported by the thoughtful guidance of Be The Change Consulting. It represents a broadening of our focus and a deepening of our ambition, which is highly informed by the growing needs, engagement, and possibilities made visible over these past few years.

School's Out Washington's pivotal role as an intermediary shifted considerably in 2020 as youth, families, and the youth development programs that support them have navigated the pandemic and the current period of pandemic recovery.

Our organization moved quickly to deliver a new level of support to the field and address some of the most critical issues impacting youth development programs across our state. Through responsive training and professional development—and by successfully advocating for and administering equitable funding to programs focused on BIPOC youth and youth in poverty—SOWA supported providers in sustaining and expanding their work so they could meet the growing needs of their communities.

As we emerge into a post-pandemic world, expanded learning programs are navigating new challenges as they work to address the increased need for mental health supports for youth and staff—all while navigating a decrease in funding as COVID-related resources close out. Many grassroots and BIPOC-led organizations expanded with COVID-related investments in response to the heightened needs in their communities. Now, with limited funding available, they are in a precarious position as they seek to sustain their impactful programs.

The important role and potential of youth development and expanded learning programs to not only help youth and communities navigate hardship, but also to thrive, has never been more visible. We see what is possible when systems align and programs and youth development staff are well supported. It is time to invest in a fundamental shift in priority—ensuring equitable, holistic, and year-round support for youth by building a robust expanded learning ecosystem that spans all Washington communities.

This strategic plan outlines our theory of change, strategic focus, and the foundational components of our work. Through Advocacy and Collective Action, Grantmaking, Data Insights and Engagement, and Professional Learning and Program Quality Improvement, we will move toward our vision. We know that achieving this vision requires that every strategy we're focused on over the next three years advances equity, especially for youth at the intersections of BIPOC identities and poverty.

We are excited to get started, and I hope you'll join us in this collective movement.

With gratitude,

Elizabeth

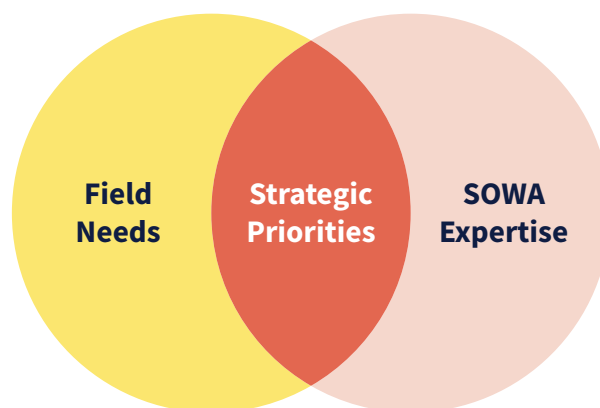
School's Out Washington is a state-wide intermediary organization dedicated to increasing access and quality of expanded learning opportunities across Washington state. As an agency primarily dedicated to increasing equity, this strategic planning process centered on soliciting input from BIPOC and rural communities. As the intensity of the pandemic begins to subside, a new set of priorities are emerging for youth providers everywhere—to elevate mental health supports, integrate learning with healing and wellness and re-establish psychological safety and connection for young people, their families, the providers and the network of organizations that were all impacted so deeply.

At the same time, SOWA experienced significant change in the past three years, with added positions, staff turnover, significant growth in its grantmaking work and shifts in organizational structure. Staff reflected on incredible assets in the organization, including:

- **A consistent commitment to equity, youth voice and participatory decision-making**
- **Grantmaking efforts that lift program quality while reducing barriers to access**
- **Dedicated, committed staff**
- **Practices to integrate community voice, gather feedback and continuously improve offerings by staying close to the ground.**
- **Rich network of providers, funders and policymakers that allows SOWA to be a conduit, advocate, story-teller and leader in policy work.**
- **Design and delivery of responsive trainings and coaching**
- **Convening the field, providing training and building the capacity of providers**

This strategic planning process was positioned at an opportune time to assess field needs, organizational capacity and infrastructure and generate a set of priorities to guide SOWA's pursuits in the next three years.

The data gathered through this process came from stakeholders, partners and staff and reflects the reputation that SOWA has built as an entity who listens because people showed up to share. Some of the ideas shared fell squarely into SOWA's strategic advantages, while others represented important ideas for other collaborators in the Washington ecosystem to take on. This process helped SOWA both clarify broad needs in the field, assess their capacity and expertise and see connections between their own work and the need for valued partners with diverse expertise.



KEY TERMS

Expanded Learning Opportunities

Afterschool, summer, and out-of-school-time programs that engage young people in high quality enrichment, academic support, and overall development - vital opportunities to help them learn and grow outside the school day.

Youth Development

An intentional, strength-based approach that inclusively and equitably engages young people within their communities in a manner that centers youth voice and leadership. Youth development is culturally responsive, fosters positive relationships and the development of skills and competencies that help young people reach the future they envision. (Youth Development Workgroup)

Youth Program Quality

A research-based continuous improvement process shown to improve program quality and youth outcomes.

Expanded Learning Ecosystem

The set of structures/sectors, policies, practices, and cultural norms that support scalable and sustainable delivery of, and youth and family engagement in, expanded learning opportunities. See page 23 for a graphic depiction of the ecosystem.

Equity

Fair, just and active inclusion that allows people of all identities to thrive and feel a sense of belonging, no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, ability, or other characteristics.

- Includes a focus on outcomes that are most appropriate for a given group, recognizing different challenges, needs, and histories.
- It is distinct from diversity, which can simply mean variety (the presence of individuals with various identities). It is also not equality, or “same treatment”, which doesn’t take differing needs or disparate outcomes into account.
- Systemic equity involves a robust system and dynamic process consciously designed to create, support, and sustain social justice.
- SOWA has a specific focus on closing gaps in access for BIPOC communities historically impacted by systemic racism, and for youth furthest removed from opportunity, i.e., foster care, housing insecurities and youth experiencing poverty.

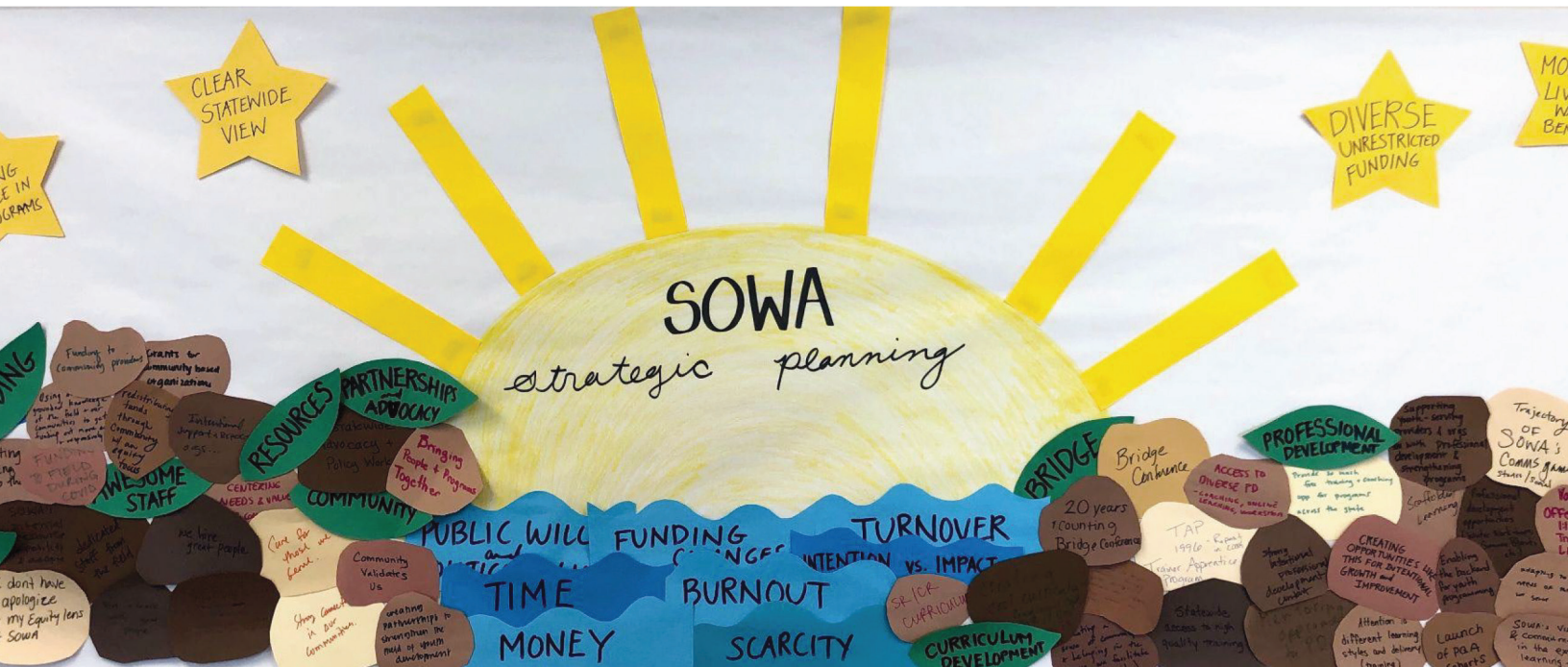
Strategic Planning Process Overview

The School's Out Washington 2023-2026 Strategic Plan synthesizes input and feedback from about 70 key stakeholders (see Appendix B for a list of participants), including youth program providers (front line staff and managers/directors), systems leaders across the state and SOWA staff. Conducted by Be the Change and the Strategic Planning Core Team, the strategic planning process included four listening sessions, nine interviews and a staff strategic planning retreat.

Strategic Planning Core Team

The core team was a diverse and inclusive group of members of SOWA's staff and board based on a variety of factors including position, decision-making approach, tenure, experience with strategic plans and balance in racial identity, gender identity and geographic region (see Appendix A for the list of members). The role of the core team was to provide input and feedback throughout the strategic planning process, hold a key role in data collection as interviewers, provide key insight into the emerging data from the field, as well as to support in refining the developed theory of change, strategic priorities and overall strategic plan.

Participants were asked a series of questions regarding the broader expanded learning field's needs and gaps, as well as SOWA's best role in supporting the field and an equitable expanded learning ecosystem. SOWA staff were asked additional questions regarding what staff most need in order to be successful and impactful and around what cultural norms should we most focus on to advance internal equity.



LISTENING SESSIONS

Four listening sessions were facilitated in January 2023 and engaged a total of 65 participants. See Appendix C for a sample listening session tool.

- 6 youth program front line staff. Two-thirds identified as BIPOC and two-thirds were based in organizations located outside of King County (Spokane, Raymond and Tacoma).
- 12 youth program managers/directors. At least five identified as BIPOC* and 2 participants were from organizations in King County, 4 from Spokane County, 3 from Pierce County and the remainder were from other counties.
- 13 systems stakeholders (funders, policy makers, school districts and other intermediaries). About two-thirds identified as BIPOC and 7 were based in King County, 4 in Pierce County and 2 in other counties. Several participants had a statewide focus in our work.
- 24 SOWA staff. At the time of the staff listening session, SOWA had 31 staff, 2 of whom were on leave. All staff were invited to add additional input in writing following the meeting. At that point in time, 58 percent of SOWA staff identified as BIPOC.

*Note: Demographic information was voluntarily submitted upon registration.

INTERVIEWS

Nine interviews were conducted by the Strategic Planning Core Team in January 2023 and engaged 10 stakeholders (2 in one joint interview), largely representing key systems partners, funders, policy makers and regional leaders. See Appendix D for the interview protocol.

Three of the 10 interviewees identified as BIPOC while the rest of the stakeholders identified as White. Participants were based in King, Olympia, Pierce and Spokane Counties, and two represented national partnerships.

Figure 1: Map of Our Strategic Planning Participants





STAFF STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT

A full-day strategic planning retreat was facilitated on March 27, 2023 to engage with the emerging findings from the listening sessions and interviews, reflect on SOWA's successes and accomplishments, engage with the emergent themes from our listening sessions and interviews, surface challenges, gather input on SOWA's strategic priorities and map tactics and actions that align to our strategic priorities.

The findings and recommendations of this plan will guide how SOWA prioritizes our resources and efforts over the next 3 years.



PERSPECTIVES ON FIELD NEEDS AND GAPS

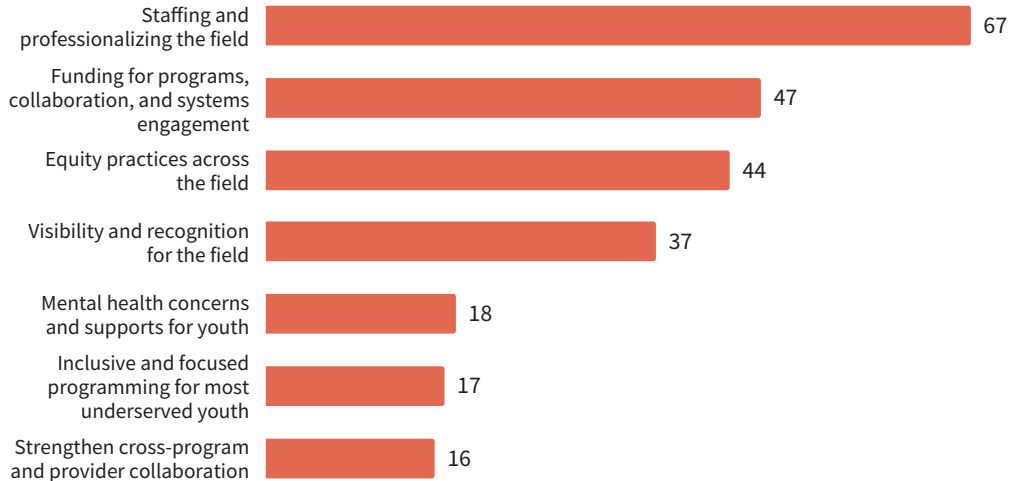
We asked stakeholders to reflect what has changed as well as the overall needs and gaps in the expanded learning field. Key needs and gaps that emerged included staffing, funding, equity, visibility and recognition, support for increased mental health needs, inclusive and focused programming, and cross-program and provider collaboration.



Questions we asked:

- What has changed in the current context for Expanded Learning programs versus 3 years ago?
- What does the Expanded Learning field need?
- Where do you see gaps and inequities within the Expanded Learning Ecosystem?

Figure 2: Field Needs and Gaps Themes: Number of Mentions



Note: The counts reflected in this figure represent the number of times a comment was made in relation to a theme, not the number of people that made a comment.

STAFFING AND PROFESSIONALIZING THE FIELD

The most commonly referenced issues facing the field was around workforce development and retention and was mentioned much more often by systems leaders and SOWA staff in comparison to front line and management provider staff.

Stakeholders shared that over the pandemic, high levels of staff burnout and vacancies have created an acute staffing shortage. This shortage destabilizes program quality in a myriad of ways. There is a need for increased wages, intentional attention to recruitment & high quality training for staff. We need more support for front line staff who are facing the same disparities that our youth are facing.

There is an opportunity to professionalize the field by creating career paths, developing more pathways for professional growth and career development to attract and retain talent and greater commitment to provider staff. This includes:

- Shifting the perception from temporary staff to expanded learning professionals by creating clear, accessible professional and career pathways into the field and establishing competitive professional wages and comprehensive benefits.
- Developing leadership pathways for youth and leaders of color within organizations and systems by providing robust, research-backed trainings, certifications and opportunities for career advancement to support entry-level BIPOC professionals to stay in the field.
- Providing consistent and equitable access to training, reflection, mentoring and coaching for youth program staff and leaders to build their professional networks and strengthen their skills around SEL, behavior guidance, trauma-informed practices, DEI practices, program design and curriculum development.
- Developing organizational infrastructure and capacity building support for collective care, prevent staff burnout and innovate solutions around hiring, finance, HR and operations.

“The jobs that programs create need to provide solid career paths and professional training. Orgs should show greater level of commitment to program facilitators.”

– *Front line provider*

“Professionalize the field—pay teachers properly, give part time staff benefits, and provide staff training so staff can pivot from just ‘managing’ kids to really helping them grow and learn.”

– *Systems stakeholder*

“Staff at all levels are tired and many, burnt out.”

– *SOWA staff*

FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS, COLLABORATION AND SYSTEMS ENGAGEMENT

After staffing, funding was the most frequently mentioned need or gap facing the expanded learning field that was raised by systems stakeholders, management providers, SOWA staff, but not by front line providers.

Several providers mentioned that they were able to capitalize on COVID funding sources, but those funds are now drying up. For example, rural areas of Washington lack protected sustainable, multi-sourced funding and the infrastructure for systems-collaboration. The one-time pandemic funding allowed some rural programs to expand but not sustain.

The following funding needs surfaced:

- More sustainable, public funding streams
- Funding direct service programs in rural areas and for BIPOC-led organizations (and especially BIPOC-led organizations serving rural areas or areas with few BIPOC-led/culturally-specific programs)
- Flexible, multiyear and unrestricted funding that detangles the notion that lower Average Daily Attendance (ADA) mean lower costs and understands the nuanced factors that contribute to program costs (e.g., higher barriers to program access in rural areas, the need for higher than living wages to BIPOC staff who have historically been underpaid, etc.)
- Funding for smaller, community-led organizations with higher barriers to funding access
- Funding to support higher wages for staff (as demonstrated in the staffing section)
- Funding to support systems collaborations and advocacy engagement, both at provider and system level.

“Funding is the primary need. If we increase funding, we can address needs of staffing, outreach and support for families and community education.”

– *Systems stakeholder*

“More funding allocation to rural communities — understanding that a smaller population does not always mean lower costs. We have fewer resources available to us and are filling huge gaps...which are really expensive.”

– *Youth program manager/director*

“[We need] access to diverse programs in rural communities. In King County a kid could find a different program for each interest, but in rural communities often 1 program has to do it all.”

– *Youth program manager/director*

“Most programs are started by local community members and only then can apply for programmatic funding from state and foundations. When a community is resource limited, then programs don’t have seed funding. Rural and Eastern WA is impacted by this tremendously.”

– *Systems stakeholder*

EQUITY PRACTICES ACROSS THE FIELD

Across stakeholders, equity practices were mentioned as another major challenge and need for the field and was a particular focus for front line providers. While the feedback around equity ranged widely, a few key themes emerged.

Overall, stakeholders expressed that there is a need to strengthen the commitment to anti-racism and equity across the field, including working from a common definition of equity.

When it comes to engagement, stakeholders shared that the field needs streamlined strategies to solicit input and feedback from youth, families and direct service providers to inform programming, support

youth and community-led work and to shape system and advocacy priorities. This feedback system should compensate them for their expertise. A youth engagement strategy could look like community hosted roundtables by neighborhood, to lift the nuanced experiences that young people face in their area.

In addition to intentional engagement strategies, culturally-responsive programming was emphasized as a key need to deepen equity. Stakeholders named that the field could support more culturally-responsive programming, both through training and community connections for white-led organizations trying to prioritize BIPOC and historically marginalized youth and by investing in BIPOC-led and other culturally responsive programs and approaches with facilitators who share identities and lived experiences with youth.

As was mentioned in the staffing and funding sections, there is a need for more equitable access to programs, funding, training and quality improvement supports.

“Need to conduct meetings to collect feedback from people that work directly with expanded learning field-collaboration and partnership with communities and parents, teachers. Need more inputs from the participants and staff who are directly connected to Expanded learning field.”

– *Front line provider*

“The Expanded Learning field needs a larger commitment to anti-racism and dismantling systems of oppression. Oftentimes the Expanded Learning field is acting as a band aid for larger systemic issues.”

– *Youth program manager/director*

VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION FOR THE FIELD

While providers, staff and systems stakeholders mentioned that a positive from the past three years was increased visibility for programs and the field, the need to strengthen the visibility and recognition of the field was also emphasized as an ongoing gap and need to be addressed. This was particularly raised by systems stakeholders and SOWA staff. SOWA staff were also the only group to explicitly highlight the need for more robust data and analysis.

Many providers expressed feeling like an “afterthought” to the K-12 system, that there was a disparity in perception of the value of the expanded learning field and providers which also leaves some areas underfunded.

Stakeholders shared that there needs to be a legislative champion and for the work of the Expanded Learning field to be better publicized, documented and shared on a state-wide level.

In order to strengthen visibility and recognition for the field, SOWA staff emphasized a need for more robust access to data, analysis and research to complement the data they currently have in order to better advocate in the field.

“[We need] a champion in the legislature that can actually make change happen. Change that is equitable, relevant and helps us advance the field.”

– *Youth program manager/director*

“K-12 system does not REALLY understand YD field. We are not perceived as a true, professional partner, but more of ‘those people over there, watching kids after school.’”

– *Systems stakeholder*

“Data and research! It is hard to advocate for this work without the research and data behind and that is very limited at this time.”

– *SOWA staff*

ADDITIONAL THEMES

These additional themes emerged from the responses of stakeholders regarding the needs and gaps in the field. These were not raised quite as often as the themes outlined above but were raised across most listening sessions.

Mental health concerns and supports for youth. Stakeholders, especially providers and systems stakeholders, noted the increase in mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and self-harm among youth and the need for, and increasing recognition of, social-emotional learning as an approach and focus for expanded learning programs.

“Increased isolated and mental health concerns during the pandemic completely changed the landscape for programming and student’s needs.”

– *Systems stakeholder*

Need to offer more inclusive and focused programming for most underserved youth, including youth with disabilities, neurodivergent youth, systems-impacted youth, migrant youth, english language learners and transitional aged youth. Stakeholders, especially providers, mentioned the gap in supporting youth with more complex needs and the importance of sustained funding and well-trained staff in order to support these young people. One provider emphasized the need to ensure long term opportunities and support for older youth who tend to age out of traditional youth programs.

“Students with more complex needs as young as Pk-5th grade and [we’re] not having enough resources, people, advocacy, systems working together to address this within afterschool/child care programming!”

– *Youth program manager/director*

Need to strengthen cross-program and provider collaboration, including between schools and youth programs. Several providers and staff spoke of the need for increased cross-program collaboration to meet intersectional needs in SEL skills, skill building and culturally-responsive approaches with wrap-around services to meet basic needs, more flexibility around time and place of offerings.

“All youth serving organizations should work hard to understand what other opportunities are available for our youth [share information across programs/providers] so that we can work to fill the needs gap.

– *Front line provider*

SOWA'S ROLE AND FOCUS

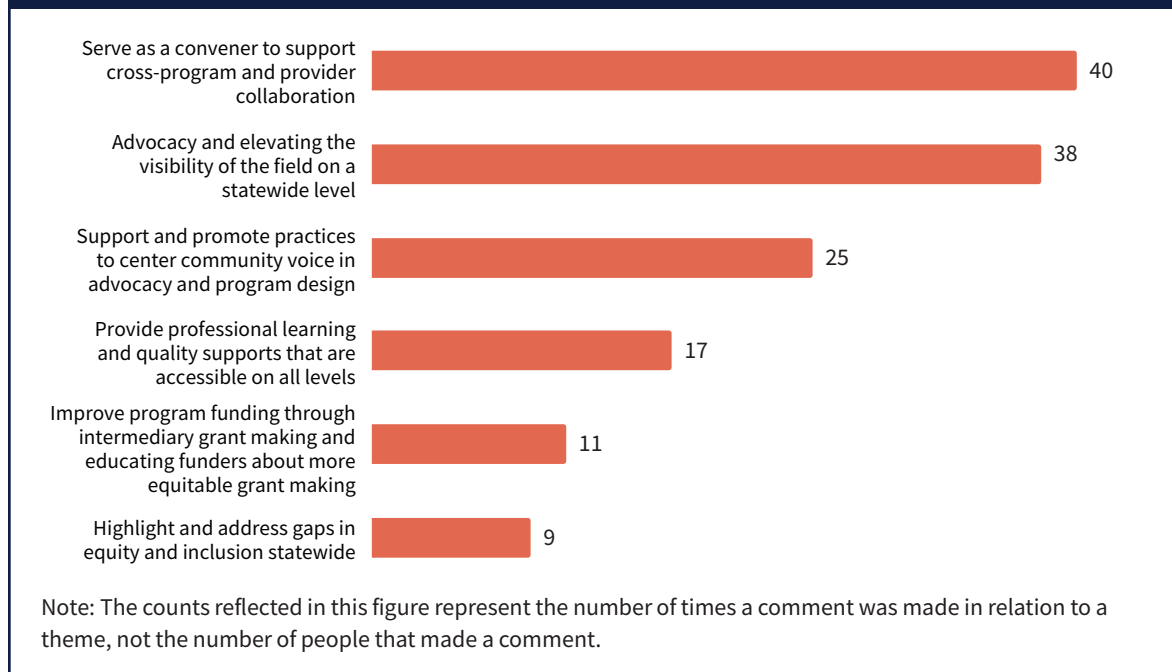
We then asked stakeholders to consider SOWA's role in the field and where SOWA should prioritize its work. Key themes that emerged included serving as a convener, providing accessible professional learning and quality supports, advocating and elevating the visibility of the field, supporting practices to center community voice, improving program funding through grantmaking and funder education and focusing on statewide equity and inclusion.



Questions we asked:

- What is SOWA uniquely poised to do, compared to our colleagues in the field?
- How could SOWA better support your work?
- What are the opportunities for SOWA to be more impactful in our work?

Figure 3: SOWA's Role and Focus Themes: Number of Mentions



When looking across input, we saw that many of these themes intersected and responses often could fall in multiple areas. This comment captured the spirit of the ways that these themes can and do intersect:

“Combine advocacy (to get more sustainable funding), sharing learning space and community engagement with young people. This work doesn’t have to be separated but can be done all together. This can look like creating an advocacy event that is community center/led and knowledge is shared.”

– *Systems stakeholder*

SERVE AS A CONVENER TO SUPPORT CROSS-PROGRAM AND PROVIDER COLLABORATION

Across all four listening sessions and interviews, stakeholders mentioned SOWA was uniquely poised to support the field by serving as a convener.

Stakeholders spoke to building on our successes in cultivating networks across the state and creating spaces and convenings for providers to collaborate, learn and share with each other. They mentioned that supporting cross-program and provider collaboration would also lead to less duplicative and shared best practices, increased continuity, shared accountability and goals for youth.

They also emphasized the need to both practice and guide meaningful cross-sector partnerships, including with schools and districts and youth development organizations focused on juvenile justice, housing partnerships and other systems that interact with youth.

“We can create shared learning opportunities for service providers and programs, where different systems that interact with young people can come together and share. This ensures that the field will become less duplicative and driven by best practices.”

– Youth program manager/director

“SOWA seems to have deep ties to both in-school and after-schools programs/ professionals. It would be great to see more connections across these communities so that there is more continuity and shared goals for youth.”

– Front line provider

“Going forward we need continued the integration, shared learnings, frankness, honesty and transparency. These things are really key to this type of partnership. SOWAs willingness to show vulnerability really has encouraged us to have shared accountability.”

– Systems stakeholder

“Act as a bridge to foster the relationships between youth program providers and systems stakeholders.”

– Systems stakeholder

ADVOCACY AND ELEVATING THE VISIBILITY OF THE FIELD ON A STATEWIDE LEVEL

While related to the convener role, stakeholders, especially SOWA staff and systems leaders, emphasized SOWA’s position for strong statewide advocacy and important role in raising visibility and awareness about the field to the legislature, funders, school systems, families and the general public.

Several stakeholders spoke to the good work SOWA has done to make the work of youth development professionals visible and the importance of building on that work and using shared language to tell a cohesive story of the field.

Providers, systems leaders and SOWA staff also identified the need to utilize the data we collect to raise awareness about field and provider needs and impact and the opportunity to develop accessible communications tools for others to use to advocate as well.

Staff also emphasized the value in articulating a clear vision for an equitable expanded learning ecosystem and advocating for statewide infrastructure to support the youth development sector. They also raised that SOWA needs to lean into our role as a leader and thought partner in the field as a connector between providers, systems stakeholders and the community.

“Statewide advocacy - be the voice of the work that we do that is not specific to one organization (i.e. scouts, Y, BGC, etc.) The more awareness there is, the more opportunities for funding, etc.”

– Youth program manager/director

“SOWA is uniquely poised to speak with a strong voice in legislature - because of our connection on the ground, quality assessments and data and our handle on both local and statewide needs.”

– Systems stakeholder

“SOWA has the ability to fund and envision what systems change and quality improvement of programs look like. Many frontline orgs are in crisis mode and don’t have the capacity to do this work.”

– Youth program manager/director

“Make the needs of young people known to the public so that there is a greater understanding of why Out of School Time is so important.”

– Youth program manager/director

“SOWA trainings often have the most data collection that I can recall so somehow compiling what was said here to present as needs for the state to an entity would be helpful. Working for a district, it is easier to present program ideas if we can prove their success in other areas.”

– Front line provider

SUPPORT AND PROMOTE PRACTICES TO CENTER COMMUNITY VOICE IN ADVOCACY AND PROGRAM DESIGN

Another major theme that emerged across all listening sessions and emphasized most by staff and systems stakeholders was engaging communities—and specifically providers, youth and parents, in all aspects of our work, and particularly around advocacy, professional learning and program design.

A couple of stakeholders specifically emphasized listening to and engaging youth, giving them the opportunity to identify issues and concerns that most impact them and having that inform our advocacy and supports. While strategies around how to engage community and youth voice were less clearly articulated, stakeholders named this as a core value to guide SOWA’s work.

“We have access to our youth care professionals and a level of trust. We can ask and learn what they need and build that into our systems: professional learning, training, coaching, advocacy, policy etc.”

– SOWA staff

You have a network and it stretches far and wide. I think some of us need a little help when it comes to advocacy and legislation and how much we can commit to making big impact/big changes.. How deep is your network connecting every provider to understanding legislation process. Are you accessing everyone?

– Youth program manager/director

Create a state of WA youth summit to understand where youth are at and how to support them better

– Front line provider

SOWA needs to be more driven by community (youth, families, direct service provider). The more community driven SOWA is, the more impactful it will be.

– Youth program manager/director

PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND QUALITY SUPPORTS THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE ON ALL LEVELS

Training and quality supports were mentioned prominently as a key role for SOWA, with providers recognizing the value this has brought to their programs and program managers/directors wanting to see this continue to grow.

While there were mixed feelings from program stakeholders regarding virtual and in person trainings, providers acknowledged that virtual offerings have made these supports more accessible statewide even if they are sometimes less engaging or impactful.

Providers want to see trainings remain low cost or free, more geographically accessible and program quality intervention continue and become more accessible and supported.

“Reup on the quality training and make it accessible geographically and financially.”

– Program Manager/Director

“Seeing many comments about needing more trainings. Wanting in person is great, but virtual trainings help reach people who can’t necessarily travel all the time. Virtual trainings allow folks to get more training, more often.”

– Youth program manager/director

“SOWA has helped our organization with whatever question or whatever situation we are in. They helped with getting more youth involved in our program, getting youth interest and most important they also help us with mentorship.”

– Front line provider

“Youth program quality intervention. Lot of trainings and professional learning community. Collaboration with communities and schools etc. Program quality is big part of SOWA. It has helped us to make improvement for designing our program more effectively to serve the students.

– Front line provider

IMPROVE PROGRAM FUNDING THROUGH INTERMEDIARY GRANT MAKING AND EDUCATING FUNDERS ABOUT MORE EQUITABLE GRANT MAKING

Another theme brought forward by all stakeholder groups and especially by systems stakeholders was around the role that SOWA can play in supporting more equitable funding approaches as an intermediary grant maker and leveraging that role to educate funders and public agencies around more equitable practices.

There was praise for the approach SOWA has taken in our grant making and the equity practices embedded in it and encouragement to continue in and potentially grow that role while sharing best practices and making our processes more visible as a model for others.

Even more comments focused on educating funders about these practices and convening funders with practitioners to help them understand the equity needs and practices.

“Changing the ways grant makers open RFP’s, review grants in a white supremacist way, interview, evaluate and report...BSK initiative is so different than what I’ve come across, how can they elevate this work so other funders are doing the same.”

– Youth program manager/director

“To help identify funders and engage in conversations with large funders about equity needs, salary needs, etc. so that funders are prioritizing orgs that are having quality impact as opposed to just numbers impact. They could also be a connector between funders and orgs.”

– Youth program manager/director

“SOWA has done an expert job of implementing BSK and getting a tremendous amount of funding out. There was a thoughtful and explicit process around funding BIPOC-led orgs and were were great at pushing on new and different ways of funding. Continuing with 2.0, we can really build on the lessons learned and making the YPQI work more impactful, with a tiered approach. Everything we think about has equity in the center.”

– Systems stakeholder

“Act as a convener for funders and practitioners to discuss opportunities and barriers to come up with operational solutions of support.”

– Systems stakeholder

“SOWA is known by name and for its impact and quality of work. SOWA might be poised to serve as a potential public/private partner with the state, to drive funding to community and lift up programs.”

– *Systems stakeholder*

HIGHLIGHT AND ADDRESS GAPS IN EQUITY AND INCLUSION STATEWIDE

Across all listening sessions and some interviews, stakeholders named that SOWA could address equity gaps across the field and through our programming.

Several addressed the opportunity to support organizations to better support youth furthest from opportunity and specifically youth at the intersections of race (BIPOC-focus), poverty, ability, gender, language and homelessness. This included training and coaching supports and a general call for SOWA’s programs and services to be focused on these populations and equity gaps.

Relatedly, stakeholders also suggested that SOWA focus its work and encourage program growth/expansion around geographic and programmatic gap areas, including focusing in places with fewer programs and ELO supports, such as rural areas.

“Urge organizations to truly center on the youth within the margins (TBB) i.e. those experience homelessness, have disabilities, wheelchair using youth, youth with autism.”

– *Front line provider*

“Advocate for and deliver more targeted funding and services for programs supporting BIPOC youth and youth in poverty.”

– *SOWA staff*

“Encourage growth (new providers, expanding orgs, etc) into gap areas- geographic, age, content.”

– *Systems stakeholder*

“Expanding work more statewide and in more program areas- specifically help with school-age!”

– *Youth program manager/director.*

SOWA'S INTERNAL EQUITY CULTURE & STAFF NEEDS

We asked SOWA staff to engage with questions related to their needs and alignment to an equitable, anti-racist internal staff culture. The themes that emerged included a refined strategy, increased staffing, professional development and compensation and honing in on a couple key cultural norms and practices.



Questions we asked:

- As SOWA expands its depth and breadth, which of the following do SOWA staff most need to be successful?
- At SOWA we understand we are impacted by dominant culture characteristics - some driven from the field around us and some from our own internal structures. If you had to choose one of the following ideas for SOWA to work on in the following year(s), which would you choose?
- Over the years at SOWA we have worked to combat the effects of white supremacy culture. During a virtual staff session with consultants in September 2022, we worked in small groups and generated a set of norms. If we could focus on one norm what do you think would create the most impact for us?

REFINED STRATEGY

The top theme for staff was about clarifying our strategy, understanding how program goals connect to strategy and arriving at common goals, objectives and definitions (including what equity means in our work). This also showed up around prioritized cultural norms staff want us to focus on, particularly around connecting internal processes to strategies and creating these processes and strategies with transparency.

Staff expressed the need for a formalized and aligned feedback loop both with the field and internally, structured checkpoints that allow staff to ensure that the day-to-day work is anchored in and connected to strategy and an organization-wide tool that shows progress toward goals.

Staff named that in addition to further clarifying and visibilizing SOWA's goals, it is crucial to identify how all of our work ties into those goals, how our roles support and align with these roles to promote collaboration and counter siloing and to develop cross-team committees to support engagement.

Connected to staffing needs, team members also mentioned the need for equitable boundaries around roles, workload and a strategy to support decision making around saying yes or no to good ideas.

INCREASED STAFFING, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMPENSATION

Another major theme was around SOWA staffing, with many indicating that we need to increase staffing to support capacity and balance the workload and to invest in more professional development and staff development.

Staff also expressed that strengthening SOWA's internal infrastructure, administrative capacity and sustained strategy implementation was a high priority.

They also acknowledged that with increased capacity, more funding and resources are necessary and increased compensation and benefits should be also prioritized.

CULTIVATING CULTURAL NORMS/PRACTICES

SOWA staff identified two key cultural norms to cultivate within the team:

- 1** Combating the sense of urgency to get more done without sufficient time to plan and strategize.
- 2** Learning from and practicing generative conflict within SOWA team culture

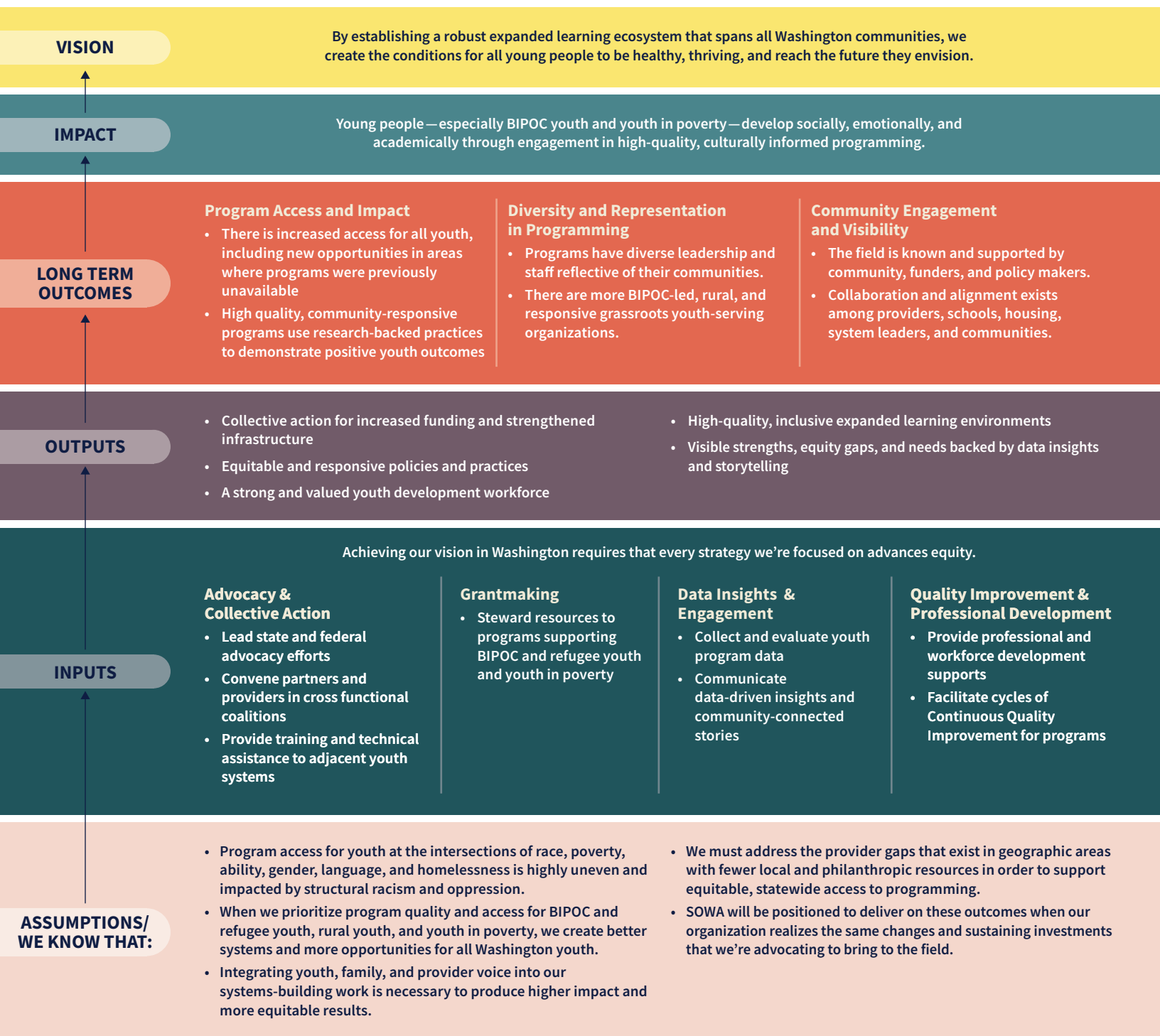
The staff also expressed interest in SOWA developing and modeling an internal culture and working structure for the expanded learning field that prioritizes collective care, people and balance, lifting up ideas such as 4-day work weeks, increased collective rest and equitable compensation and benefits.

In addition to these areas, staff also shared the need to intentionally set time for fun, community building and strengthening relationships across the team.

Articulating SOWA's Theory of Change

The following theory of change was developed by a guiding team at SOWA, drawing on inputs from the data collection process. This visual demonstrates the connections between SOWA's various streams of work and the impact and vision SOWA strives to realize.

Theory of Change



Ecosystem



Recommendations and Strategic Priorities

The SOWA staff reviewed the data collected and collaboratively developed the following priorities as a strategic focus for SOWA over the next three years. These priorities reflect the impact SOWA hopes to achieve and also should be understood in the context of the resources (e.g., money, staff time and infrastructure) available to achieve results.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Increase Equitable Funding for the Field

To respond to this key need raised by stakeholders for SOWA to strengthen advocacy, grantmaking, and funder education/organizing regarding equitable grantmaking, SOWA will prioritize increasing equitable funding for the field through the following:

TACTIC	ACTIONS	WE CAN MEASURE OUR SUCCESS BY TRACKING...
<p>1 Advance SOWA's advocacy plan through a community-driven process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage existing coalitions (i.e., Youth Development Strategy Table) to develop an advocacy plan that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverages data Integrates community engagement Elevates youth voice through provider networks Maps opportunities around the state Identifies policy demands and opportunities to shift the political ecosystem With the coalition, develop and implement an advocacy strategy to secure ongoing state funding and resources for the field. Create a process to track which organizations receive state resources in the field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of providers and community members engaged in advocacy # of youth engaged in advocacy # of active YDST members # of policy wins # of BIPOC organizations receiving funding
<p>2 Position SOWA to influence funding practices by developing and disseminating a common grantmaking framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess SOWA's various grant programs to understand commonalities and differences and distill effective practices. Define the set of guiding principles and practices that shape our grantmaking approach. Share the methodology with stakeholders and partners to influence responsive grantmaking practices for the field. Plan for the additional internal infrastructure needed to receive and disseminate additional funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of a grantmaking framework # of times framework is shared in an online publication, presentation, or convening
<p>3 Secure new funders/ investors to resource the field and advocacy efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize the advocacy plan and grantmaking framework to advocate for more resources. Educate funders on the needs and gaps in the field (as laid out in the advocacy plan). Disseminate additional resources as they emerge towards priorities identified in the advocacy plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased municipal, county and state public investments in expanded learning and youth development Increased engagement of private foundations in SOWA's funder convenings and YDST Increased funding for the coalition and SOWA's advocacy leadership

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Strengthen Collective Impact and Community-Driven Solutions through a Formalized Convener Role

To respond to another key need identified by the field for strengthening cross-provider partnerships and elevating youth, provider, and field needs, SOWA will formalize and leverage its unique convener role and prioritize strengthening collective impact and community-driven solutions through the following:

TACTIC	ACTIONS	WE CAN MEASURE OUR SUCCESS BY TRACKING...
<p>1 Clarify and amplify SOWA's identity, role, and purpose as a convener.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalize and standardize SOWA's convening purpose, philosophy, and practice grounded in equitable practices, youth development theory and collective impact methodology. Integrate messaging about SOWA's role as a convener in all communications and messaging. Train/socialize and, when possible and strategic, expand staff in the convener role Develop expanded and segmented email lists for ongoing communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization-wide clarity on SOWA's strategies for convening Documentation around convening practices and procedures Email lists are up to date
<p>2 Determine where and who SOWA convenes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop SOWA's convening criteria and priorities Identify other existing cross-sector conveners and key convenings where constituents meet and ensure SOWA has a strategic presence/role balancing local and state efforts Assess gaps and opportunities to establish new groups or convening opportunities to advance other strategic priorities Cultivate strategic partners in local areas to advance SOWA's reach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established strategic partners across the state Increased presence at local/state efforts
<p>3 Build and strengthen networks of providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen provider networks and connections across the state. Assess opportunities to integrate youth perspectives in networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of networking opportunities
<p>4 Disseminate learnings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate a learning/dissemination agenda to share what is learned with staff internally and partners in the field. Gather ongoing learnings/feedback to continuously improve convening practices and build the capacity and analysis of the field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published learning agenda/reports

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Strengthen Data and Evaluation Capacity

To support SOWA’s overall advocacy strategy, its ability to tell the story of the field, and highlight statewide equity and inclusion gaps, SOWA will prioritize strengthening its data and evaluation capacity through the following:

TACTIC	ACTIONS	WE CAN MEASURE OUR SUCCESS BY TRACKING...
<p>1 Strengthen SOWA’s internal research and evaluation capacity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralize coordination and alignment of data and evaluation efforts across the organization; reduce redundancies and improve efficiency of effort Explore establishing research and evaluation partnerships as a strategy to expand capacity Identify and resource priority staffing and infrastructure needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization-wide evaluation work plan # of improved data and evaluation processes
<p>2 Implement and strengthen continuous quality improvement processes across SOWA teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalize goals, including equity impact goals, for each program area Develop a data template for every program area to reflect on data; include disaggregated data and equity measures Create a standard protocol for how internal teams reflect on data Generate ideas for a data dashboard: What would be useful to see on-going? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflections from data templates How often teams reflect on data Published data dashboard
<p>3 Generate data/evaluation learnings to disseminate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold evaluation/ communications/program team meetings to identify data/learning that can be shared broadly with the field. Gather data/evaluation from partners to share with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published evaluation data Integration of data into communications and story-telling.
<p>4 Integrate youth voice/perspective into assessment and reflection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess how to integrate youth and family voice into SOWA’s reflection (through direct work, or elevating the efforts of partners). Scale/expand this work in future years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased documentation of qualitative and quantitative data on youth and family perspective
<p>4 With strengthened capacity and partnerships, evaluate existing data and insights and identify research/ evaluation plan to address key knowledge gaps aligned to equity and advocacy priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify bright spots and needs in the field, with a focus on racial equity and other equity gaps. Define potential storylines to articulate the story SOWA wants to tell paired with data; engage community stakeholders in reviewing data and storytelling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of a formalized research agenda. Published stories of the field that utilize data

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Invest in Staff, Organizational Culture and Sustainability

To ensure staff and organizational sustainability and to emphasize the importance of allocating resources to an internal facing strategy, SOWA will prioritize investing in staff, organizational culture and sustainability through the following:

TACTIC	ACTIONS	WE CAN MEASURE OUR SUCCESS BY TRACKING...
1	<p>Develop budget proposals and fundraise for organizational sustainability and full capacity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with an organizational consultant to revise our fund development strategy and staffing plan. • Develop high, medium and low budget scenarios to support increased staffing and infrastructure. • Allocate resources in the following areas as possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development staff • Administrative/Operational capacity • Staff compensation/benefits • Infrastructure for the following <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Systems (Elevate Washington and data analyst/staffing) • Advocacy • Convening • Regional Hubs • Fundraise through grants, major donors, fee-for-service and advocacy efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization-wide evaluation work plan • # of improved data and evaluation processes
2	<p>Invest in a thriving, equitable and inclusive organizational culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a working group to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a prioritized list of organizational culture strategies, sorted by no cost, low cost, high cost. • Assess feasibility based on funding. • Implement highest priority strategies. • Establish a culture of celebration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase rituals for celebration and honoring of diverse cultures • Increase opportunities for informal connection and on-going relationship building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined organizational assessment tool • Staff turnover/ retention rate • Exit interviews • Staff satisfaction survey results
3	<p>Establish a professional development strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a career progression framework for SOWA staff to see entry points and growth potential in the organization. • Equip supervisors to effectively support staff development & career progression • Explore: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-functional and higher-level training & work opportunities • Free/Paid PD opportunities to develop desired competencies • Formalized mentor system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth plans for each staff • Evidence that staff progress in their careers over time • Staff accessing PD opportunities
4	<p>Conduct a strategic assessment by program area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a rubric to assess program area activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment to Theory of Change • Alignment to Strategic Priorities • Equity Impact • Resource/Cost Need • Plan to improve alignment or reduce program areas that are less well aligned and resourced • Generate a comprehensive work plan for all program areas; including periodic opportunities for structured reflection on progress • Confirm that capacity exists to complete all work as planned. Prioritize available capacity and right-size program work plans to available capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload assessment • Structured opportunities for reflection and evaluation of work plan
5	<p>Build an internal and external communications practice to strengthen alignment and impact across programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish key strategic tools/processes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-year communications plan • Brand message framework • Content/marketing strategy and editorial guidelines • Tools, templates and training for staff to become SOWA ambassadors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly defined and aligned programs and initiatives • Marketing/ outreach data and feedback • Staff use of communications tools and templates

APPENDIX A

Strategic Planning Core Team Members

Elizabeth Whitford, CEO

Omana Imani, King County Expanded Learning Systems Director

Fahren Johnson, Strategy & Partnerships Director

April Miller, Lead Coach

Sergio Beltran, Pierce County Program Quality Manager

Benny Baird, Spokane County Program Quality Manager

Tran Tonnu, Marketing Manager

Rowena Pineda, Board Member

Nicole Yohalem, Board Member

NOTE: The roles in this list are reflective of 2023.

APPENDIX B

Strategic Planning Process Participants

PROVIDER AND SYSTEMS STAKEHOLDER LISTENING SESSIONS

Echo Abernathy, Bethel School District

Katya Miltimore, Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington State

Juliet Taylor, Cultivate Learning

Mei-Li Thomas, Department of Education and Early Learning

Claire Bruncke, Dylan Jude Harrell Community Center

Munira Mohamed, East African Community Services

Jodi Wall, Educational Service District 112

Madylin Sandoval, Foundation for Youth Resiliency and Engagement

Megan Smedsrud, Greater Tacoma Community Foundation

Kimberly Keith, Hilltop Artists

Isis Lara Fernandez, Launch

Tamara Korth, Mead School District/Shiloh Hills Elementary School

Shawn Peterson, Na'ah Illahee Fund

Miao Miao Dang, Open Doors for Multicultural Families.org

September Htoo, RCIS

Domonique Williams, Renton Innovation Zone Partnership

Alexis Hood, South Bend Early Learning Center

Jahni Leggett, Tacoma Boat Builders
Jenny Taylor, Tacoma Boat Builders
Kenya Storey, Tacoma Boat Builders
Shannon Shea, Tacoma Boat Builders
Byron Williams, Tacoma Housing Authority
Robert McAfee, Tacoma Housing Authority
Sophie Biddle, University of Washington
John Reid, Urban Family
Randy Ramos, Urban Native Youth Organization (UNYO)
Velma Brehm, Urban Native Youth Organization (UNYO)
Allison Wherry, YDEKC
Abby Woodward, YMCA Inland Northwest
Aundrea Adams, YMCA of the Inland Northwest
Valerie Freres, YMCA of the Inland Northwest

INTERVIEWS

Megan McJennett, BSK King County
Melissa Bookwalter, City of Seattle, DEEL
Hikma Sherka, Every Hour Counts
Sydney Forrester, Governor's Office
Erin Vincent, LaunchNW
Jenny Plaja, OSPI
Lisa Jaret, Tacoma Creates
Sheely Mauck, Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality
Kim Ferraro, West Central Community Center

APPENDIX C

Sample Listening Session Tool



**SOWA Strategic Plan
Listening Session**

Direct Line Staff

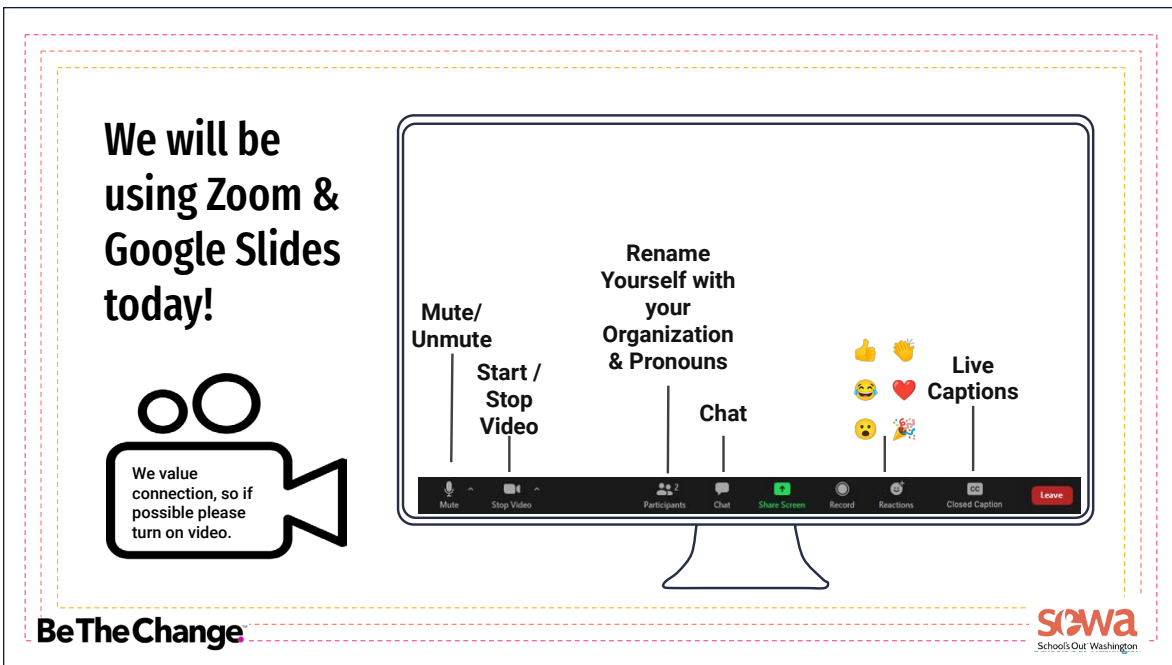
Focus Group
Date: January 11, 2023, 10-11:30pm PST



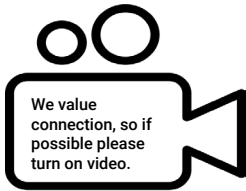
BeTheChange



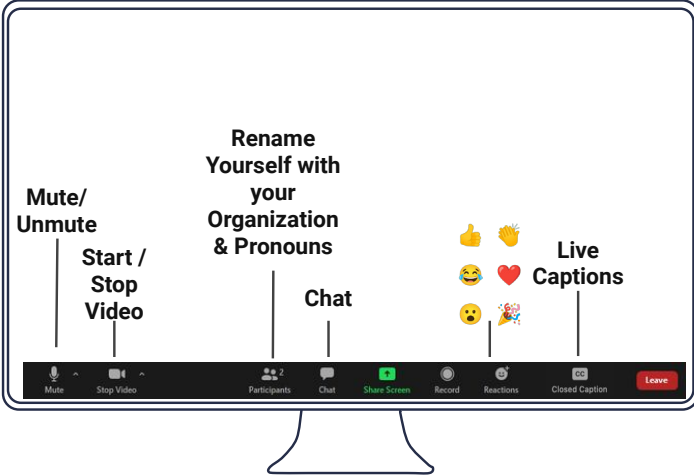
Page 1




**We will be
using Zoom &
Google Slides
today!**



We value connection, so if possible please turn on video.



BeTheChange



Page 2

You may participate by speaking, typing into the chat, or typing directly into the slide.
Click any box to start typing.

BeTheChange



Page 3

Inclusive Community Practices



Sharing

Remembering to make space for folks off-camera to share.



Time

Be mindful of time. Try to split time evenly. *Take space, make space.*



Participation

We'll use a speaking order: Black and Indigenous identified folks share first, then POC, then white folks.



Respect

Respect folks whose opinions and perspectives may differ from your own.

BeTheChange



Page 4

What has changed in the current context for Expanded Learning programs versus 3 years ago?

BeTheChange

sowa
Schools Out Washington

Page 5

What does the Expanded Learning field need?

BeTheChange

sowa
Schools Out Washington

Page 6

Where do you see gaps and inequities within the Expanded Learning ecosystem?

BeTheChange

sowa
Schools Out Washington

Page 7

What is SOWA uniquely poised to do, compared to our colleagues in the field?

BeTheChange

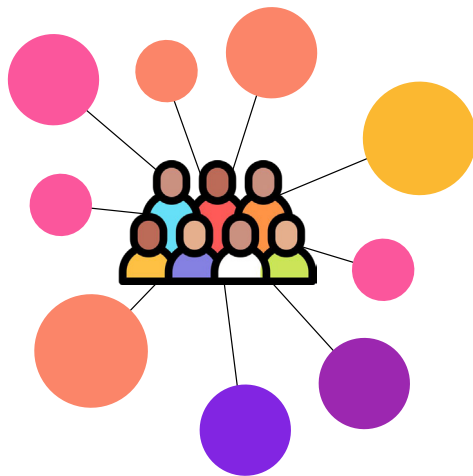
sowa
Schools Out Washington

Page 8

With limited resources, where should we most prioritize our services and impact?

Professional Learning	Quality Improvement services	Grantmaking	State-Level Advocacy
Coalition Building	Deepen in King, Pierce, Spokane Counties	Shift our efforts to be more statewide	Local-Level Advocacy
Expand our work in school-aged child care	Expand our work in BIPOC led organizations	Expand our work in School- Community / place-based partnerships	Expand our work in adolescent programs

BeTheChange



**Thank you
for being
here!**

BeTheChange



APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

- 1** What has changed in the current context for Expanded Learning programs versus 3 years ago?
- 2** What does the Expanded Learning field need?
- 3** Where do you see gaps and inequities within the Expanded Learning system?
- 4** What is SOWA uniquely poised to do, compared to our colleagues in the field?
- 5** How could SOWA better support your work?
- 6** What do you understand SOWA's current work to be?
- 7** What are the opportunities for SOWA to be more impactful in our work (i.e., Professional Learning, Quality Improvement Services, Grantmaking, Advocacy, etc.)?
- 8** With limited resources, where should we most prioritize our services and impact?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEMS STAKEHOLDERS

- 9** How can SOWA leverage its relationships with you and other systems stakeholders to advance the work of youth program providers?
- 10** Are there new partnerships SOWA should consider in the next three years, to strengthen the Expanded Learning Ecosystem in WA state?
- 11** Are there new funding streams we should be taking advantage of?