

20 BRIDGE  
25 CONFERENCE



# Together We Rise

October 27-28  
Bellevue, Washington

## Highlights from the 2025 Bridge Conference: Together We Rise

School's Out Washington's 2025 Bridge Conference was held on October 27 and 28 at the Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue, Washington. Our conference theme, **Together We Rise**, resonated through the keynotes, workshops, and conversations as hundreds of changemakers from across Washington gathered to celebrate and lean into collective resilience, empowerment, and shared success.

Support from our funder and sponsor partners was vital to ensuring the success of the conference, lowering barriers to accessing professional learning opportunities for youth development professionals, and creating a meaningful event full of learning, connection, and growth.

A summary of the conference is provided in this document, along with photos and additional highlights on our website at: [schoolsoutwashington.org/2025-bridge-highlights](https://schoolsoutwashington.org/2025-bridge-highlights).



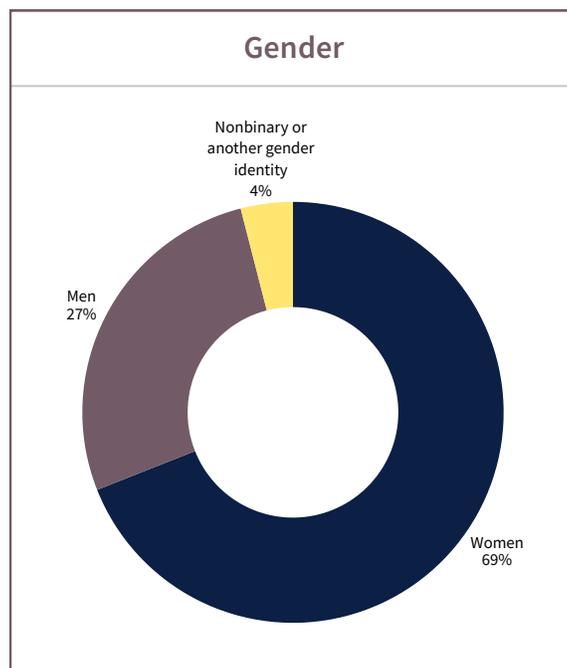
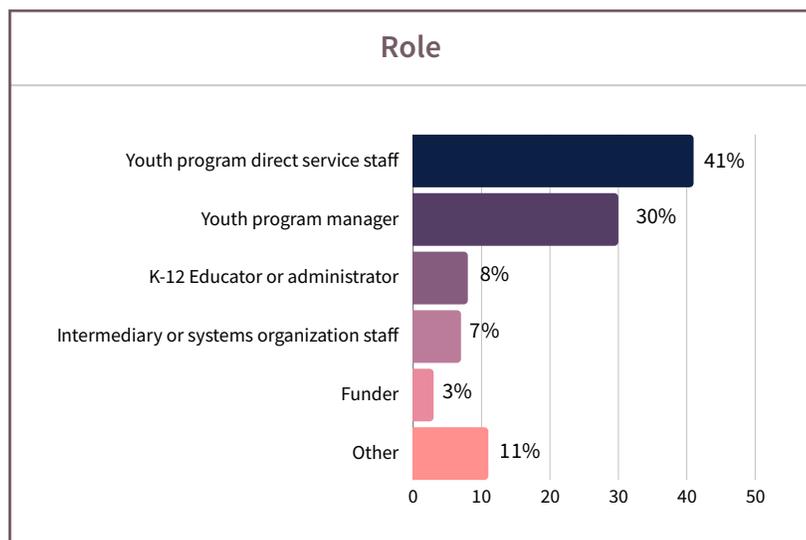
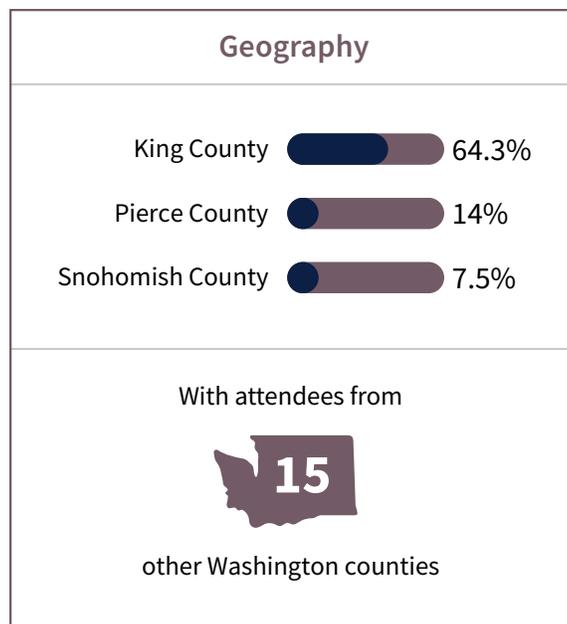
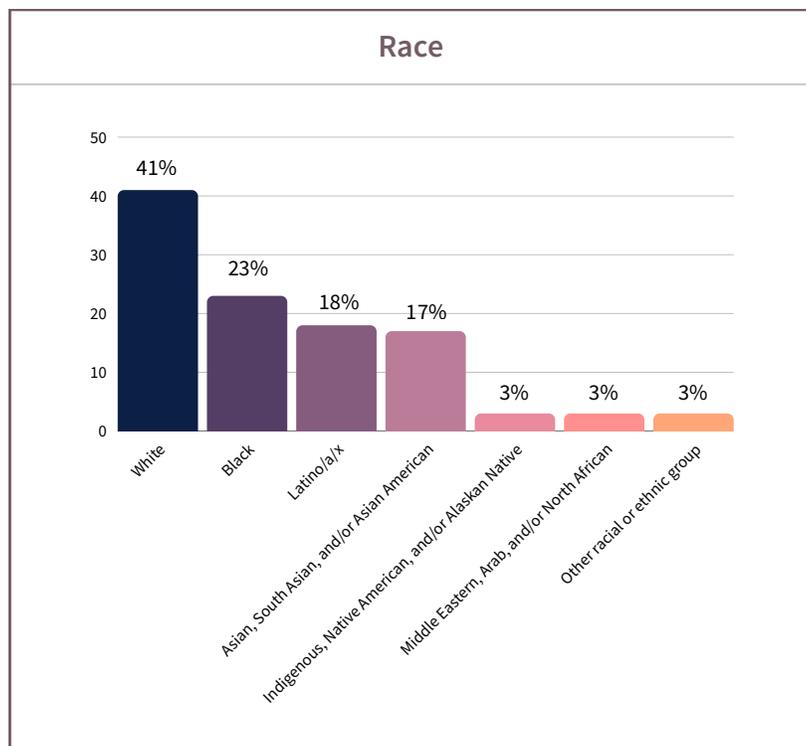
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## ATTENDEES

A total of 558 individuals attended the 2025 Bridge Conference, and 204 scholarships were awarded to remove financial barriers to attendance, with a focus on ensuring diverse representation. The following provides an overview for attendees who chose to share their demographic information in 2025.



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## KEYNOTES & BREAKOUT SESSIONS

This year's Bridge Conference included 72 presenters, 50% of whom identify as BIPOC, and 41% of whom live and work outside King County. The following provides highlights of our keynotes and breakout sessions.



### *Opening Keynote*

Dr. Lee Porscha Moore set the tone at Bridge with a powerful message about healing-centered engagement, highlighting the importance of building and sustaining healthy relationships, understanding who we are, investing in personal and collective well-being, and giving youth agency to act and create change. Dr. Lee Porscha Moore's background includes over a decade of experience in mental health and eight years of experience in teaching in higher education.



### *Closing Plenary*

We closed the conference with an engaging panel discussion on Mobilizing for Equity and Opportunity in the Youth Development System. Led by host Nicole Yohalem (Senior Director of Knowledge Management, Casey Family Programs) and featuring panelists Representative Kristine Reeves (District 30), Erica Limón-Trefielo (Associate Director of Communities in Schools Washington), and Corey Belser (Executive Director, D.R.E.A.M. Foundation), this motivating fireside chat explored the importance of critical hope, community building, and collective action. Panelists shared how navigating foster care, social support systems, and rural resource deserts as young people informed their commitment to youth development as adults.



### *Breakout Sessions*

Over the course of the two-day conference, attendees chose from 50+ workshops offered by youth development professionals and advocates from across the state, exploring key topics such as trauma and mental health, designing inclusive and empowering programs, racial equity and justice, and self and collective care. Presenters offered a variety of opportunities for attendees to dive deeper, connect with peers in the field, and explore applicable tools and resources to bring back to programs and staff. Attendees praised workshop presenters for their energy, expertise, practicality, and intentional engagement during sessions.



Attendees also had a chance to connect outside of workshops, including during our Exhibitor Showcase & Happy Hour, Networking & Coffee Chats, and live interactive art experience led by Seattle artist Christopher Coleman of Artistic Love Life.

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## EVALUATION SURVEY & PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Participant feedback was positive, with participants appreciating the sense of community and connection they formed with others across the youth development sector, the strength of the workshops, the conference's strong equity focus, and the keynote speakers and closing plenary panel.

Based on responses to the overall conference evaluation survey:



Here are a few highlights of participant feedback we received this year:

*This is the first time I have attended and by far one of the best conferences I've ever been to in my life. Thank you for all the hard work that it takes putting it all together.*

*Just connecting with people who I have worked with in the field for over two decades, including young people who were previously in programming, who are now youth development professionals themselves.*

*Thanks for not beating around the bush at the current state we are in politically. Always appreciate how raw and authentic this conference is!*

*The workshops were amazing. The staff and participants were great. Learned a lot and made a lot of connections.*

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## ACCESSIBILITY

School's Out Washington has always worked to create a Bridge Conference that is accessible for attendees. Through our Access and Inclusion Guide to the conference, we provide information on submitting accessibility accommodation requests, location accessibility, inclusive learning environments, food and materials, and health and safety protocols.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

**Cost:** Each year, the cost to deliver a high-quality, two-day in-person conference increases more rapidly than youth development programs' budgets for professional development. We work to contain costs and subsidize the price of attending for youth program providers by raising sponsorships and scholarships. Even with those efforts, cost remains a barrier for some program providers, and especially those who want to join from outside of the Puget Sound Region due to the added costs of travel and lodging. To address this, we will work to increase event sponsorships and seek scholarship sponsors for providers joining us from across the state.

**Location:** This was the first time we offered the conference at the Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue, WA. There were many aspects of this space that worked well, including their responsive event management team and a relatively affordable and central event space that can accommodate a conference of our size. However, participants provided feedback around challenges with parking and traffic, that in particular impacted participants joining from outside of the Seattle-Bellevue metro area, and our team found some challenges with the layout of the space for supporting breakout sessions and exhibitor space. Next year, the conference will return to the Tacoma Convention Center, which is more accessible, affordable, and offers more flexible exhibitor and breakout spaces.

**Accessibility and Inclusion:** We received both praise and suggestions for improvement around our efforts to create accessibility and inclusion at the conference. We look forward to incorporating these learnings into next year's conference, including continuing to offer diverse, interactive workshops to meet a variety of interests, identities, and languages, ensuring ample food that meets different dietary needs, refining our approach to offering both all-gender and single-gender bathroom access, ensuring pronoun pins are easily accessible, and strengthening our vetting process for vendors.

Together, these improvements reflect our commitment to listening, learning, and creating a stronger Bridge Conference in October 2026.



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The Bridge Conference continues to play a very important and unique role in supporting and connecting our amazing and diverse youth development leaders and providers across Washington, and that was especially clear this year. Even in a time when youth development programs and providers are navigating heightened challenges (financially and otherwise), we did not see a dip in registration, attendance, and engagement.

Our team at School's Out Washington is grateful to our funders and sponsors for supporting this conference and helping to make this signature experience possible for our youth development sector in Washington. Your support is instrumental to its success. Thank you so much.

