Washington Youth Development Fund

A Public-Private Partnership to Advance Youth Development in Washington State

Led by: School's Out™ Washington

Vision

All Washington youth, especially those furthest from justice, have consistent access to youth development programs that promote their holistic development, well-being, and future success.

North Star

At least 25,000 more Washington youth will access high quality youth development programs supported by the Washington Youth Development Fund, a public-private partnership investing $25M+ per year in high quality programs across the state.

Why SOWA?

Changing systems so children and youth can thrive is hard, decades-long work. Time and again, SOWA has proven we're here for it—determined, driven, and durable in leadership. Over our 40-year history as a statewide afterschool intermediary, we've built power and accrued policy and funding wins by building relationships and being in coalition with hundreds of providers and thousands of youth and families across Washington.

We mobilize around what local communities say is important—and what their stories reveal is possible for youth through high-quality youth development programs and equitable funding. Funders, policy makers, and providers trust SOWA as an accountable partner. Even when the youth development sector faces setbacks in a changing environment, SOWA anchors the field with its vision, tireless advocacy, and immutable drive to expand access to afterschool for all children statewide.

Why this initiative?

In the state of Washington, public funding for youth development programs is inadequate and uneven. Washington leaves thousands of youth–especially those in rural areas, in low-income communities, and who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)–on the sidelines without access to learning opportunities beyond the school day. This neglect harms all youth and is short-sighted for our communities and Washington.

Why now?

Unlike the 26 states that have established and increased funding for youth development in recent years, Washington has stepped backwards, nearly wiping out all state investments in this crucial sector. While these times are challenging, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a sustainable fund through which current and upcoming social media lawsuit settlements can support youth wellbeing. Establishing the Youth Development Fund parallel to the settlements is a crucial step toward realizing this vision. Now is the time for private and public partners to join together, through bold and urgent action, to meet the moment for youth and our state.

Initiative Goal

With a goal of $14M in philanthropic investment over three years, the Washington Youth Development Fund initiative is bold and urgent.

Launch the Washington Youth Development Fund

This initiative will launch and seed the Washington Youth Development Fund, our state's first Fund for centralizing public and private investment in youth development. This Fund is strategically positioned to expand through future social media settlement funds.

Washington's approach to state funding for youth development programs has been through uncoordinated, small, one-off investments scattered across multiple agencies. It is nearly impossible to track funds, spend wisely, or communicate overall results, which made these investments highly vulnerable to massive cuts in 2025. The Washington Youth Development Fund will bring transparency and efficiency while expanding access and deepening impact for more than 25,000 youth.

Achieve Funding and Policy Wins for Youth Development

Youth development stakeholders will mobilize across the state to help the public and legislators learn about the high demand for youth programs and the overwhelming bipartisan support for public funding. Alongside SOWA and our coalition partners, youth will lead the way in developing leadership skills and communicating to legislators and the general public how their participation in programs is making a difference in their lives and futures.

Advance Equity and Accountability in Funding

The Washington Youth Development Fund can help close gaps in program access – but only to the extent we understand where program gaps exist, for whom, and how best to overcome them. This initiative will support research and evaluation to generate the insights needed to bring equity and accountability to Fund implementation.

Youth development programs include afterschool and summer programs, mentoring programs, and wrap-around support.

Youth development programs operate in community spaces, schools, parks, small businesses, faith institutions, on tribal lands, online, and more.

Our Three Priorities

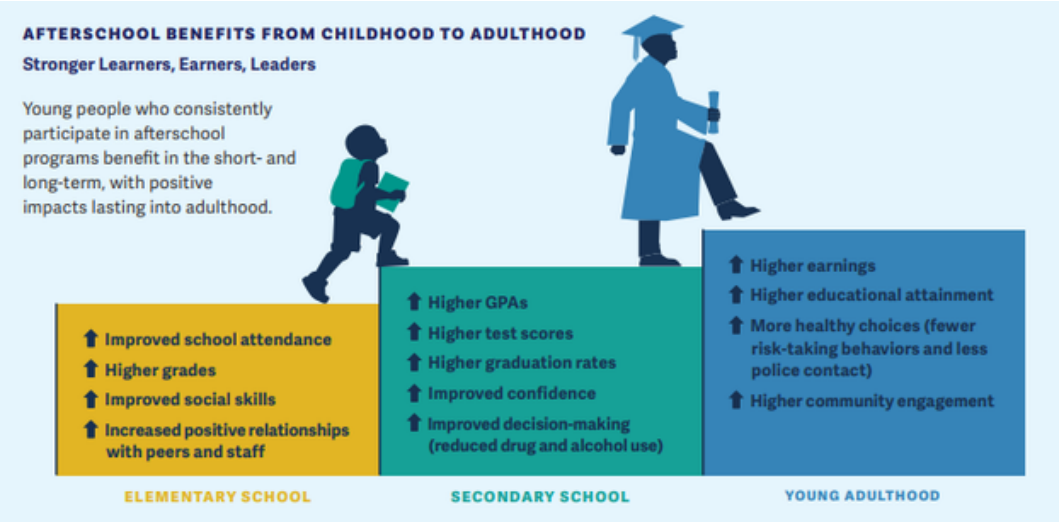
PRIORITY #1

Launch the Washington Fund for Youth Development

With your support, we will work with policymakers to launch the Washington Youth Development Fund.

Through the Washington Youth Development Fund initiative, we will partner with policymakers on legislation to establish the Fund and build a public-private partnership to provide seed funding that spurs greater public investment in youth. Funding raised through this initiative will flow directly to youth programs. When the Fund reaches $25M in public-private support annually, more than 25,000 additional youth in our state will have access to youth development programs.

Youth development programs keep kids safe, help them build life skills, and get them excited about learning. And, the money spent on youth programming provides a significant return on investment for communities.

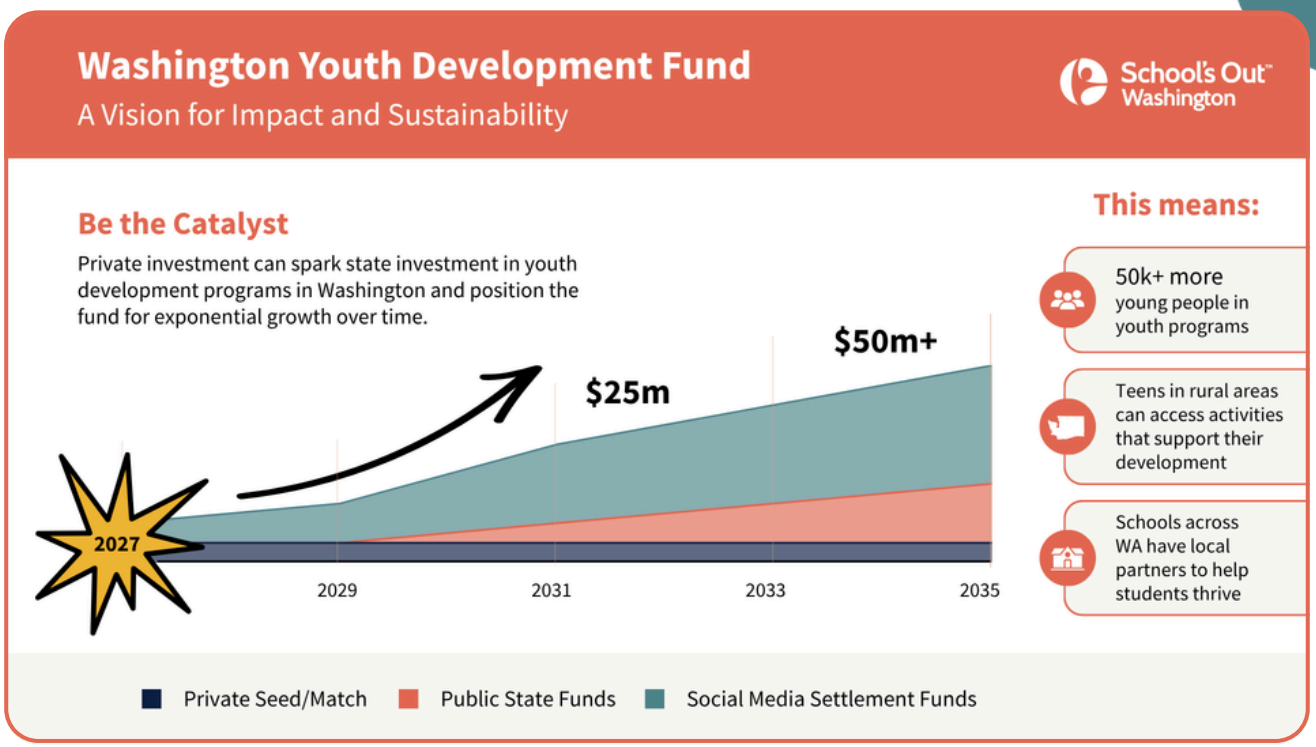


Source:

Vandell, D. L., and Simpkins, S. Organized Afterschool Activities as a Developmental Context for Children and Adolescents. Advances in Child Development and Behavior. 2024

Yet in Washington, the approach to funding youth programs is anything but thriving. Federal funding is limited and vulnerable. Local public funding and private philanthropy are highly uneven across the state. Funding is insufficient and doesn't meet families' demand for programs across the state. This leaves thousands of rural, BIPOC, and low-income youth with limited access further behind.

How Washington funds youth development must change. And a proven solution is ready.



The Washington Youth Development Fund will replicate successful in-state models, ushering in a new era of funding for youth development programs that is:

- Codified in statute
- A destination for both public and private funds
- Centrally administered by a named state agency
- Transparent so state investments in youth development are clearer for legislators
- Well coordinated; less cumbersome and mysterious
- Guided by grantmaking that takes into account poverty, geography, and demographics
- Forward-looking by positioning youth development to benefit from future dedicated funding, such as the social media settlement.

With your support, we will:

- Partner with legislators to codify the Fund in statute
- Seed the Fund with private funding investments
- Incentivize state funding
- Activate much-needed grant funding to youth development programs across the state
- Position the Fund for growth in the years to follow

PRIORITY #2

Achieve Policy and Funding Wins for Youth Development

With your support, youth leaders and coalition partners will expand advocacy for youth development.

Through the Washington Youth Development Fund initiative, we will significantly expand our efforts to inform and educate policymakers about the high demand for youth development programs, the overwhelmingly positive and bipartisan parent support for public funding of youth development programs, the life-changing impact of programs on young people, and how Washington benefits from these investments.

Across the country, state-level funding for afterschool and summer learning programs increased 20-fold between 2000 and 2024, with 26 states including Oregon, California, and Michigan collectively providing more than $5 billion in funding for local programs. (Afterschool Alliance, August 2024)

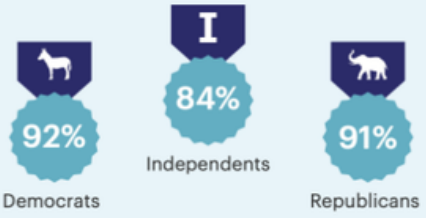
Yet Washington is far behind its peers. Having never achieved significant or sustaining state investment in youth development, a small set of largely one-off investments totaling roughly $20M and buried in multiple state budgets were almost fully wiped out in the budget cuts of fiscal year 2026.

These cuts mean:

- Youth are sidelined and fall behind
- Parents, especially those in the workforce, experience stress and uncertainties
- Communities forego benefits of youth success

WASHINGTON PARENTS SUPPORT ACCESS AND FUNDING.

More than 5 in 6 Washington parents (86%) agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs and about 9 in 10 (89%) are in favor of public funding for afterschool opportunities. Across political affiliations, support for public funding is high.



America After 3, Afterschool Alliance, 2025

It is an urgent priority to stem further cuts and advocate for greater youth development funding in Washington through public and legislator education, statewide coalition engagement and mobilization, and youth leadership and engagement in advocacy.

SOWA Policy and Advocacy Program for Youth Development

Public and legislator education

We will anchor our messaging in language that resonates with voters and demonstrate to legislators the strong bipartisan support we have for this issue in their districts.

- Implement a powerful messaging and education campaign
- Organize site visits for legislators to youth programs in their districts
- Begin establishing a Youth Development Caucus in the state legislature

Statewide coalition engagement and mobilization

We will mobilize the Youth Development Strategy Table, our diverse, statewide coalition of youth development providers and advocates to generate a groundswell of demand for state investment in and support of youth development.

- Engage and organize coalition members year ‘round
- Set the policy agenda
- Conduct candidate forums
- Organize Youth Development Advocacy Day in Olympia

Youth leadership and engagement in advocacy

We will mobilize the voices of youth who are directly impacted by the state’s approach to youth development:

- Expand the Youth Advisory Subcommittee to 20 youth
- Educate Youth Advisors about youth development, policy and organizing
- Engage Youth Advisors to inform state advocacy priorities and strategy
- Plan and execute legislator education events such site visits and panels
- Mobilize other youth leadership coalitions around Advocacy Day and beyond

PRIORITY #3

Advance Equity and Accountability in Youth Development Funding

With your support, we will lead an evidence-based approach to defining gaps and access to youth development programs across Washington and we will evaluate early Fund implementation.

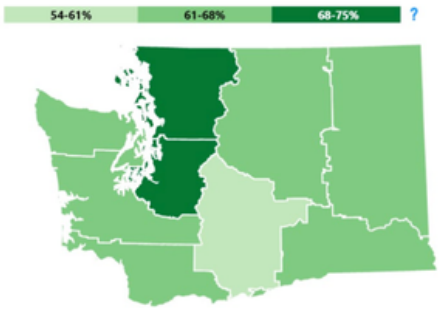
To advance this effort, we will partner with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to document gaps in youth development across our state and evaluate the Washington Youth Development Fund.

Due to uneven funding, access to youth development programs is highly inequitable and less available in rural, BIPOC, and low-income communities. Over 40% of Washington parents report there is no available afterschool program in their neighborhood.

Designing an equitable grantmaking program for the Washington Youth Development Fund requires deeper understanding of where these gaps exist and for whom, plus ways to overcome them.

Because program practice and continuity are key to ensuring young people experience positive outcomes, it is imperative to look beyond access to program capacity, sustainability, and youth engagement. Understanding these factors will strengthen the Fund's long-term impact for youth and families across our state.

Policymakers, funders, providers, and families deserve transparency when it comes to how Fund implementation is proceeding. Early evaluation will help the Fund demonstrate and deepen impact, positioning the Fund to grow parallel to social media settlement funds. That's why evaluation is an essential part of this initiative from the start.



Percent of Washington State 8th graders reporting they have access to youth development opportunities in their communities, by Educational Service District. Healthy Youth Survey, 2023

We will partner with AIR to:

- Document gaps in program availability and sustainability
- Evaluate the Fund's early implementation and investment impacts
- Communicate research and evaluation findings with funders and policymakers

3-Year Project Portfolio

Priority #1
Launch the Washington Fund for Youth

$12,000,000

- Partner with legislators to codify the Fund in statute
- Seed the Fund with $12M in private funding investments
- Incentivize an estimated $6M ($2M/year) in initial state funding
- Activate grant funding for youth development programs

Priority #2
Achieve Policy and Funding Wins

$1,500,000

- Public and legislator education
- Youth leadership and engagement in advocacy
- Statewide coalition engagement and mobilization

Priority #3
Advance Equity and Accountability

$500,000

- In partnership with American Institutes for Research:
  - Document gaps in program availability and sustainability
  - Evaluate the Fund's early implementation and impact
  - Communicate findings with funders and policymakers

Timeline

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Launch Washington Fund for Youth Development			
State of Washington creates the Fund	×		
Private Philanthropy seeds the Fund	×	×	×
State funding incentivized		×	×
Funds granted to youth development programs		×	×
Achieve Policy and Funding Wins			
Public and legislator education	×		
Statewide coalition engagement and mobilization		×	×
Youth leadership and engagement in advocacy		×	×
Advance Equity and Accountability			
Document gaps in program availability and sustainability	×		
Evaluate the Fund's early implementation and impact	×	×	×
Communicate findings with funders and policymakers			×

When I was ten years old, I participated in a theater camp for the first time, and it was like an entire world I never knew existed opened up for me. I was taught lessons that still stick with me today. What a gift it is to be taught at such a young age to not fear new experiences, and to develop social skills that you can use for the rest of your life.

Youth participant, Justice for Girls

I'm so glad my mom found this program for me. It has given me a lot of support and I don't feel like being better is impossible.

Youth participant, Atlantic Street Center
(Best Starts for Kids Expanded Learning Initiative program)

This was the first time I felt like I actually belonged somewhere. The staff listened to me and helped me believe I can make friends who are nice to me.

Youth participant, age 16, Iraqi Community Center
(Best Starts for Kids Expanded Learning Initiative program)

I really don't know how to put this experience into words. Just being surrounded by queer people who actually understand me was a life-changing experience!

Youth participant, Washington State Sumer Fund grantee program

School's Out™ Washington

Mission

To drive positive systemic change so that all Washington's children and youth, particularly those furthest from justice, have access to a robust ecosystem of high-quality expanded learning programs.

Vision

We see a future where all of Washington's children and youth can access expanded learning programs that empower them to thrive.

What We Do

We help afterschool, summer, and child care programs become more robust and accessible. Anchored in collaboration, we:

- advocate for the youth development sector;
- provide tools and training to professionals who work with youth, ages 5 to 24; and
- secure funding.

Why It Matters

Our efforts benefit communities throughout the state by prioritizing youth most impacted by systemic inequity. Young people–especially BIPOC youth and youth in poverty–develop socially, emotionally, and academically through engagement in high-quality, culturally informed afterschool programming.

Priorities:

- Policy and Advocacy: We work with partners across the state and country to advocate for public funding and supportive policies for the youth development field.
- Quality Improvement: We help program providers apply a proven national model for continuous quality improvement through coaching, training, and peer learning cohorts.
- Grants: We drive resources to culturally-responsive programs in underserved communities by making grants that break down funding barriers, seed and expand programs, and strengthen opportunities for communities to lead.

Partners

- Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Office of Immigrants and Refugee Assistance, King County, City of Seattle, City of Tacoma
- Charles Stewart Mott, Arakawa, Norcliffe, Bamford, and Medina Foundations
- Youth Development Strategy Table: A coalition of public, non-profit, and community stakeholders working to establish a focused state-level youth development effort.

Contact: Elizabeth Whitford, Chief Executive Officer
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Youth Development Strategy Table

About

The Youth Development Strategy Table (YDST) is a coalition of public, nonprofit, and community stakeholders comprising nearly 300 individuals representing over 125 organizations across Washington state. School's Out Washington is the backbone organization for the YDST.

Mission

To ensure equitable access to high-quality youth development programs across Washington state—especially for low-income youth and youth of color.

What We Do

The YDST provides advocacy support for expanded learning, mentoring, and wrap-around supports. Coalition members work collectively to:

- Advance the most critical goals and priorities in the youth development field.
- Address the needs of youth experiencing the most significant disparities in educational, health, and social-emotional outcomes, including youth in foster care, adjudicated youth, and young people experiencing homelessness.
- Center our commitment to ending racial inequity and improving outcomes for children of color.
- Create funding and leadership opportunities for community-based organizations.
- Facilitate cross-sector collaboration and create efficiencies between sectors

Why It Matters

Long-term commitments to youth development from funders and legislators support the well-being of young people by sustaining early learning gains, improving academic and social-emotional outcomes, and preventing deep-end system involvement.

Leadership

- Arts Corps
- Asia Pacific Cultural Center
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Boys & Girls Clubs of WA State
- Cascade Bicycle Club
- Choose 180
- CIS Central Washington
- Committee for Children
- Communities in Schools WA
- Dylan Jude Harrell Community Center
- For the People
- Girl Scouts of Western Washington
- Girls On The Run
- League of Education Voters
- Mentor WA
- OK FYRE
- Washington Alliance of YMCAs

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