Objective
Support 3-4 community-based organizations across Southeast Michigan to increase teen engagement and youth voice in their programs and organizations. The objective will be achieved by helping organizations build or expand a youth advisory council and adopting other youth driven strategies. Organizations will increase engagement and leadership by teens and help them play new roles to plan projects, curate programs, promote events, recruit peers, fundraise, facilitate their own meetings, and advise on organizational decisions. This project is generously funded by a grant from the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation.

Introduction
When youth participate in high quality out-of-school time (OST) opportunities, they perform better academically, have higher rates of civic engagement, and are more likely to pursue higher education – regardless of socioeconomic status. OST youth spaces, however, are typically adult-driven with programs and services provided for youth. Young people are rarely provided the opportunity to lead their own programs, let alone participate in higher organizational roles that allow them to contribute to their agencies and build their skills and self-efficacy. As a result, older youth disengage from community-based youth programs and these programs miss out on what could be the biggest return on their investment.

What would happen if we provided youth supports and opportunities to take a greater leadership role in the creation of their own program activities? How might community based programs be more effective if youth partnered with the adults as co-contributors to organizational goals and operations? What other youth skills could we foster through a new approach to youth engagement?

Why Provide Youth Greater Leadership Roles and Voice?
When youth have opportunities to make meaningful contributions in an organization their participation grows, as does their engagement, interest, and investment. A greater leadership role not only provides young people all the current benefits of OST programs, but provides new opportunities to develop 21st century skills such as problem-solving, communication, collaboration and critical reflection. One other important outcome of engaging young people in meaningful decision making is an increased civic engagement. These experiences are critical when living they are expected to be active citizens in a democratic society.
Increasing Youth Voice & Leadership in Youth Programs Across Southeast Michigan

Neutral Zone will provide intensive training and coaching to 3-4 organizations across southeast Michigan to help them empower youth in new leadership roles. Each of the sites will establish a group of 8-15 teens to serve on their leadership team, supported by 2-4 adult advisors (staff can be complemented with volunteers). To prepare and support the youth/adult team, Neutral Zone engages each of the teams in intensive training and coaching over a 12-month period.

Due to COVID-19, training and coaching will launch in Fall 2020 virtually. When the state of Michigan moves to Phase 5 of its re-opening plan, we will start planning some face/face training and coaching.

The goals of training and coaching sessions are to 1) help teams explore and understand their organizational mission and structure; 2) plan and implement youth-driven, mission-focused projects; 3) establish and sustain advisory council structures; and 4) explore ways for youth to be involved in higher order organizational and governance roles. The inputs that guide the youth engagement model include:

- **Adult staff/volunteer Orientation and Training** - After partner sites are selected, a half-day training and orientation will be provided to staff/volunteers from each organization. A half-day training will be scheduled during the week of October 26th, on a mutually agreeable date.

- **Intensive Virtual Training**: Each organization will engage their youth/adult teams in 2-3 virtual training workshops through the end of CY 2020. The goal of the training workshops is to help youth/adult teams better understand the principles of meaningful youth engagement and to work on adopting youth-driven strategies. Adult members receive professional development to support a youth-driven approach and teen members are guided in structuring and carrying out a youth driven action project. The training workshops are designed to model youth-driven practices and healthy adult-youth partnerships. The training is scheduled for each agency around the team’s availability and regular meeting times.

- **Coaching/Site Visits**: Throughout the next 8 months, Neutral Zone coaches provide site teams (youth and adults) with technical assistance, on a quarterly basis, that is tailored to meet the needs and goals of individual sites. Coaches: (a) provide additional professional development; (b) observe practice and provide feedback; (c) lead reflection on successes and challenges; and (d) consult on the development of structures and strategies to create a sustainable advisory council model.

If the State of Michigan moves to Phase 5 of its re-opening, by spring 2021, youth/adult teams will be invited to a one-day Summit at the Neutral Zone in Ann Arbor for a professional development program to connect with the peer cohort, invigorate groups, share successes, and provide new tools and training to develop a sustainable advisory council. The Summit is tentatively scheduled for April 2021.
Funding is provided by the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation and will pay all the costs for training and coaching services. Participating organizations also receive a $750 stipend to cover any travel costs or any other logistical supplies/materials to help support the youth driven work.

**What Next?**

If your organization is interested in participating in this please [complete the application on the following page](#), and **return no later than close of business on September 30th, 2020.**

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact John Weiss, Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Neutral Zone by email at [weiss@neutral-zone.org](mailto:weiss@neutral-zone.org) or Jamie Chiu [jamie@neutral-zone.org](mailto:jamie@neutral-zone.org).
Neutral Zone Youth Voice and Leadership in Out-of-School Time Programs Application (2020-21)

Applicant Name & Title: ________________________________________________________________

Organization: __________________________________________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________________________

E-Mail: _______________________________ Phone: _________________________

Website: _____________________________

In order to apply to be a part of the cohort, please answer the following questions. Please limit responses to no more than 4 pages.

1. Why do you think increasing youth voice and engagement is important for the success of your organization?

2. Describe how your youth have been involved in your organization’s activities thus far. How could you imagine their roles expanding with the support of Neutral Zone’s youth engagement project?

3. Describe your organization’s capacity, readiness and commitment to supporting authentic youth roles, including a youth advisory, in your setting. Describe your administration and/or board support and do they think this initiative fits current or new directions? Which staff would play key support roles?

4. Describe your programming in the current pandemic situation (virtual, hybrid, synchronous asynchronous). How has your program goals changed during the pandemic? How have you maintained your staff team so they can offer quality programming? How do you think participating in this initiative can help support staff?

5. Describe youth interest and readiness for participating in an initiative like this?

6. What youth development model or approach is important to your organization’s programs? What youth development training (including Weikart Methods/Program Quality) have you participated in?

7. Explain how equity and racial justice interplay with the youth work at your organization. How would you like to expand equity and racial justice in being more youth driven through this initiative?

8. What challenges do you think you might face in developing and implementing increased youth voice and engagement at your organization? How do you anticipate overcoming these challenges?
Applications are due **by September 30, 2020**

Please return completed applications to John Weiss, Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Neutral Zone by email - [weiss@neutral-zone.org](mailto:weiss@neutral-zone.org) and Jamie Chiu [jamie@neutral-zone.org](mailto:jamie@neutral-zone.org)

**Checklist for Neutral Zone’s Youth Driven Spaces in SE Michigan Application**

*Please check off all items that apply and return with your completed application:*

- [ ] Our program resides in one of the following seven counties: Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Washtenaw, St. Clair and Livingston counties.

- [ ] Our Executive Director and/or Program Director have reviewed and approved our application for this initiative

- [ ] We have 8–15 older youth (14–19 yrs old) that can participate on the leadership team for this initiative

- [ ] We have 2–4 adult staff and/or volunteers that can advise the leadership team and participate in training events with youth

- [ ] We have an adult staff representative(s) who will attend a half-day training/orientation in October 2020.

- [ ] We can support our youth to have the appropriate technology to participate in virtual training.

- [ ] Our youth and staff would be excited to be chosen and participate in this initiative