



Social Justice Drives Investment in San Francisco Youth

B.L.I.N.G. (Building Leaders in Innovative New Giving) is a new program offered through the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) in San Francisco, California. Annually, B.L.I.N.G. receives \$60,000 from the San Francisco Children's Fund (via the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families) to re-grant to local youth-led projects in the city of San Francisco.



B.L.I.N.G. MEMBERS GRANT

\$60,000

EACH YEAR TO LOCAL YOUTH-LED PROJECTS FOCUSED ON SOCIAL JUSTICE.

The group is comprised of nine high school-aged grantmakers and college-aged program officers who execute biannual grant cycles. "Because we're publically funded, we feel a real obligation to give back to our community in a big way," says Abdellatif (Abdul) Benterkia, a B.L.I.N.G. program officer and freshman at San Francisco State University.

B.L.I.N.G. focuses both its programming and its grantmaking on social justice initiatives. "Each week, we meet and discuss the societal issues and inequalities

that our community faces," shares Abdul. "We're asked to bring in topics at our meeting that we can discuss and figure out together. By bringing together our own perspectives and the issues that matter to each of us, we get a better sense of the community beyond just our own experiences."

"We ask for applications from nonprofits and youth in the area and make grants of up to \$5,000 to youth-led programs that we think can benefit San Francisco youth," explains Abdul. "One really cool part of this process is that we have an 'Early Bird' application deadline where organizations can submit their partial or complete application so we can review and send it back to them to update before we make our final decisions." In this process, B.L.I.N.G. members get the chance to learn about the different ways organizations address structural inequalities and to refine their grantmaking values and priorities. They can also offer guidance to submitting organizations, which can make funding more accessible and transparent.

B.L.I.N.G. members work to build a nuanced concept of justice while also defining what justice looks like in practice in the complicated San Francisco community. "San Francisco is hard to describe. It has a



lot of different neighborhoods and there are a lot of disparities between them,” says Abdul, “B.L.I.N.G. gives us the tools to address issues that affect our community like access to healthy food or recreational parks, and gentrification.”


One major issue that B.L.I.N.G. is working to address is the housing crisis, which palpably affects most of the youth who participate in B.L.I.N.G. Cathryn Carkhuff, the youth philanthropy program manager at YLI, explains, “San Francisco is one of the most expensive cities to live in in the United States. Doing publically funded, social justice philanthropy with young people who often live in poverty presents a number of challenges and opportunities. We lose young people in this city all the time to eviction, because they can’t afford to live here anymore.”

B.L.I.N.G. offers a small stipend to its members to help make doing philanthropy more economically feasible. This stipend does more, however, than just pay for a commute or a phone bill; it provides an opportunity to change the way we do philanthropy.

“B.L.I.N.G. intentionally puts nontraditional leaders at the center of philanthropy to flip the paradigm because we believe that young people who are impacted by injustice give differently. These young

people understand the urgency of the issues because they’re living them,” Cathryn says, “it’s a different way of relating philanthropy to the community.”

Abdul, who immigrated to the United States from Algeria in 2011, agrees, “B.L.I.N.G. gave me consciousness about the issues that are affecting the whole San Francisco community and about my abilities to make change even beyond my work in grantmaking.”

 **Tip:** Offer a stipend to program participants to expand access and create opportunities for new leaders through your program.

By providing a stipend, B.L.I.N.G. is providing economic mobility to young people who wouldn’t otherwise have an opportunity to learn about and participate in the philanthropic process. By dedicating a small portion of their funding to their funders, B.L.I.N.G. gains unique perspectives and creates a new generation of unexpected leaders.

For more information on B.L.I.N.G. please contact: Erika Céspedes at ecespedes@yli.org.



**FOUNDATION
CENTER**

©2016 Foundation Center.
This work is made
available under the

terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License,
creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0.



GRANTCRAFT, a service of Foundation Center, harnesses the practical wisdom of funders worldwide to improve the practice of philanthropy. Visit grantcraft.org to access our free resource library.

This case study was written by Kylie Musolf and developed for Foundation Center’s Youth Giving project. Photo provided courtesy of B.L.I.N.G. Visit youthgiving.org to view other free resources related to engaging young people in grantmaking.
