



Elevate Youth California: Round 3 Evaluation



Prepared for the California Department of Health Care Services in collaboration with The Center at Sierra Health Foundation

Prepared by Education Northwest and Social Policy Research Associates

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About the Evaluation Team

Education Northwest is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping all children and youth reach their full potential. Education Northwest partners with public, private, and community-based organizations to improve youth outcomes. Several members of the Education Northwest staff are based in California and have expertise in equitable research and evaluation, youth civic engagement, and youth participatory research methods.

For this evaluation, Education Northwest is partnering with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR). SPR provides research, evaluation, and technical assistance to clients at the national, state, and local levels. Equity-focused work reflects a core expertise within SPR's portfolio, which encompasses evaluations of strategies focused on building institutional capacity to advance equitable outcomes for communities, cross-sector convening and networking strategies, and field- and movement-building efforts with racial- and gender-based equity goals.

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We gratefully acknowledge that the cover photos feature youth participants from the Elevate Youth California program.

Executive Summary

Elevate Youth California (EYC) is a statewide program that addresses substance use disorder (SUD) prevention by investing in leadership and civic engagement for youth of color and 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth ages 12 to 26 who live in communities disproportionately affected by the war on drugs. EYC provides competitive grants to youth-serving community-based and Tribal organizations to implement programming through the Proposition 64 California Cannabis Tax Fund, Allocation 3, Youth Education, Prevention, Early Intervention, and Treatment Account. The Center at Sierra Health Foundation is contracted to support the implementation of EYC.

The EYC program is grounded in social justice and broadening positive youth development by addressing social determinants of health, such as structural racism, neighborhood safety, and health equity. EYC promotes civic engagement and leadership to combat structural inequities, including the criminalization of youth of color, the school-to-prison pipeline, and inequitable educational and economic opportunities.

Since the EYC program began in 2019, the California Department of Health Care Services has awarded eleven cohorts across three funding tracks:

Seven cohorts

received grants through the **Standard Track**, which focuses on policy, systems, and environmental change through youth civic engagement, mentorship, and peer-led support.

Three cohorts

received grants through the **Capacity Building Track** to strengthen the operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational structure of small youth-serving community-based and Tribal grassroots organizations.

One cohort

received grants through the **Innovation Track**, which focuses on youth-serving organizations with innovative approaches to policy, systems, and environmental change.

This evaluation presents data from 103 funded partners supported in Round 3 (2021–2024): Standard Track Cohort 3, Capacity Building Track Cohort 2, and Innovation Track Cohort 1 (table ES-1). This distribution reflects the program’s commitment to supporting diverse initiatives, from established service delivery models to capacity-building efforts and innovative approaches to support SUD prevention. A complete list of organizations that received Round 3 awards is available on the [EYC website](#).

Table ES-1. EYC Round 3 funding distribution by track

Funding track	Total funding awarded	Number of funded partners
Standard Track Cohort 3	\$52,776,550.15	58
Innovation Track Cohort 1	\$8,147,978.29	11
Capacity Building Track Cohort 2	\$13,481,232.47	34

Source: Elevate Youth California.

During the grant period, EYC Round 3 funded partners collectively engaged

51,074
new youth participants

These participants reflected the diverse communities served by the program.

91%¹
of participants self-identified as youth of color

6%²
identified as 2S/LGBTQIA+

80%³
were between the ages of 12 and 17

These figures underscore the program’s effectiveness in reaching priority populations and advancing equity in youth engagement.

Round 3 Evaluation Findings

From 2023 to 2025, Education Northwest and Social Policy Research Associates conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of EYC Round 3 funded partners. Key findings are summarized below.

Thousands of young people statewide participated in evidence-based education and training designed to prevent substance use within their communities

Between 92%–96%⁴ of youth participants in EYC Round 3 programs gained knowledge and confidence to avoid substance use, understand its harms, and seek support.

95% of youth participants indicated that they had developed an increased awareness of the detrimental impact that substance misuse—specifically drugs and alcohol—can have on communities like their own.

Youth-led efforts raised awareness of SUD in communities, created new peer-to-peer prevention activities, and promoted alternatives to suspension in schools.

I researched alternatives to suspension and presented my plan to school administrators. Now my school is considering changing how they support students.

– Standard Track youth participant

Supportive EYC mentors make a difference

Between 77%–89%⁴ of youth participants in EYC Round 3 programs reported having a mentor in their program who provided emotional support, problem-solving assistance, and goal-setting help.



Many youth described mentorship as their first stable, caring relationship with an adult outside their family.



Mentorship built trust and accountability, allowing youth to thrive in other areas of life.

It feels therapeutic to share my struggles with a mentor who guides me like an older sibling.

– Capacity Building Track youth participant

Many EYC youth participants took on leadership roles

Between 60%–76%⁴ of youth participants in EYC Round 3 programs took on leadership roles, from presenting at conferences to mentoring peers.



Leadership activities often centered on cultural pride and community responsibility.



Youth discovered their voices, built confidence, and influenced peers and adults alike.

I presented at a conference as staff, youth board member, and presenter—all because my program believed in me.

– Innovation Track youth participant

Youth drive change in their communities

Between 40%–79%⁴ of youth participants in EYC Round 3 Standard and Innovation Track programs engaged in civic action shaping structural changes that affect communities across the state.

Cannabis awareness. Youth researched how cannabis impacts their communities and shared findings to raise awareness about the unprecedented harms of legalization.

Safe community spaces. Partners created youth-led hubs for prevention, healing, and leadership development.

School discipline reform. Youth-driven research is influencing alternatives to suspension policies.

Harm reduction. Programs introduced behavioral health support and access to resources.








I mapped marijuana shops near schools and showed why it's harmful. I presented my findings in schools to raise awareness.

– Standard Track youth participant

Summary of outcomes for youth, funded partners, and communities

EYC Round 3 funded partners made measurable progress toward intended outcomes at the youth, funded partner, and community levels. Youth demonstrated strong gains in substance use prevention knowledge, mentorship, and leadership, while funded partners advanced longer-term capacity and systems change efforts. Table ES-2 summarizes evaluation findings aligned to EYC's logic model indicators of progress toward youth, funded partner, and community outcomes (see appendix A).

Table ES-2. Summary of evaluation findings across youth, funded partner, and community outcomes

Level of outcome	Logic model indicator	Evaluation finding
Youth	Increased number of youth who understand that substance use is harmful	 Fully achieved
	Increased number of youth who have at least one stable, caring relationship with an adult/older youth mentor or peer	 Fully achieved
	Increased number of youth who perceived themselves as being more empowered and confident	 Partially achieved
	Increased number of youth who demonstrated ability to present on and engage in justice and equity issues locally and beyond	 Partially achieved
Funded partner	Increased number of EYC partners receiving funding from a variety of sources	 Emerging
	Enhanced finance operations; staff development, retention, and capacity; youth voice programming; and data skills among funded partner staff	 Emerging
Community	Policy, systems, and environmental changes to increase protective factors (e.g., safe spaces, resources, support systems, community belonging) or reduce harms and risk associated with substance use	 Emerging

Source: Evaluation team.

The Bottom Line

EYC youth are more than program participants; they serve as emerging leaders, advocates, and agents of change who actively contribute to the development of healthier and more equitable communities. EYC shows the power of young people to lead change in communities most impacted by the war on drugs.

Next Steps

Looking ahead, EYC will include additional rounds of funding and ongoing evaluation efforts. This initiative will continue to evolve in response to community needs and feedback from interest holders. An evaluation report for EYC Round 4 (2022–2025), prepared by the evaluation team, is anticipated to be released in winter 2027. This report will inform future program development, funding decisions, and strategic direction.

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Key Terms

2S/LGBTQIA+ - Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual, and additional identities used by community members.

BIPOC - Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

Capacity Building Track - This track emphasizes strengthening the operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational infrastructure of community-based organizations focused on youth substance use prevention.

Core programming - Multiple or continuous services and resources provided to young people enrolled in a funded partner organization.

Cumulative report - A report completed by funded partners and submitted to The Center at Sierra Health Foundation once at the end of the grant period to report on youth served, core programming, organizational capacity, and policy goals.

Funded partner - California-based community-based organizations and Tribal organizations that received an Elevate Youth California award.

Funding track - A funding opportunity with specific goals and core program requirements.

Harm reduction - Reducing negative consequences through empowering youth to make effective decisions, thereby increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors.

Innovation - In Elevate Youth California programming, refers to introducing or adopting new ideas, strategies, or approaches that enhance how young people engage or applying the ideas, strategies, or approaches to a new setting with responsive modifications. This can include creative methods for youth leadership, using technology to amplify youth voices, and/or culturally responsive models that better reflect the lived experiences of BIPOC youth, among other strategies.

Innovation Track - This track emphasizes nontraditional methods for policy, systems, and environmental change, with an increased focus on learning through evaluation.

Mentorship/relationship-building - Projects that address social isolation and disconnection from the community by establishing at least one stable, caring relationship with an adult/older youth mentor.

Peer-led support/peer-led programming - Projects that include cultural peers or peers with similar cultural and lived experiences to foster an environment of inclusiveness and belonging, or project activities led by youth aged 12 to 26.

Progress report - A report completed by funded partners and submitted to The Center at Sierra Health Foundation at specific points through the grant period to report on youth served, partnerships, and core programming.

Promising practices - Programs, strategies, or policies that show initial evidence of effectiveness and hold potential for positive outcomes. While not yet considered evidence-based or best practices, they merit continued research.

Protective factors - Characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes. Examples include parent involvement; community belonging; and availability of safe spaces, resources, and support systems.

Policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change - A way of modifying larger structures to make healthy choices practical and available to all community members. By changing policies, systems, and/or environments, communities can help tackle health issues by looking at them from a population level. Organizations, agencies, and interest holders make policy decisions. Policy approaches include legislative advocacy, fiscal measures, taxation, and regulatory oversight. Systems change refers to a fundamental shift in the way problems are solved. Environmental change strategies involve modifying the economic, social, or physical surroundings or contexts that affect health outcomes.^{5, 6}

Round - A distinct contract funded through the Department of Health Care Services and administered through The Center at Sierra Health Foundation that includes a multiyear initiative. Each round represents a specific group of funded partners during a defined funding period to carry out programming aligned with the initiative and funding track goals.

Standard Track - This track promotes policy, systems, and environmental change by empowering through civic engagement, mentorship, and peer-led support.

Substance use disorder (SUD) - Recurrent use of alcohol and/or substances causing significant problems, including health problems; disability; and failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school, and/or home.⁷

War on drugs - Federal and state drug policies that disproportionately impacted communities of color, particularly low-income communities. Over time, these drug policies (which were intended to decrease use) criminalized communities, leading to mass

incarceration of people of color, decreased access to social services, loss of educational attainment due to diminished federal financial aid eligibility, prohibitions on the use of public assistance, and the separation of families.^{8,9}

Youth civic engagement/leadership opportunities for PSE change - Youth civic engagement related to substance use issues or drivers/root causes (i.e., trauma, systemic oppression, and marginalization). Youth voices must play a central role in determining the policy focus.

Introduction

Elevate Youth California (EYC) is a statewide program that addresses substance use disorders (SUDs) by investing in leadership development and civic engagement for youth of color and 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth ages 12 to 26 living in communities disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs. The program is grounded in the understanding that the policies and practices imposed by the war on drugs caused lasting harm to BIPOC and low-income communities. EYC recognizes that youth of color and 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth continue to experience systemic underinvestment, yet affirms that they are leaders, decision-makers, and drivers of community change.^{10, 11} The program's vision is that all young people in California have equitable opportunities to lead and create positive change in their communities.

Achieving this vision requires confronting the persistent inequities that shape youth health and well-being. Youth of color in California are less likely to receive treatment for a SUD compared to their White counterparts, with even greater barriers for 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth, youth experiencing homelessness, youth living in rural areas, and youth involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems.^{12, 13} Systemic policies continue to exacerbate these inequities, with research showing that people of color are disproportionately subject to harsher legal and criminal justice outcomes.¹⁴ These systemic barriers highlight the urgent need for culturally responsive, community-driven approaches to prevention and early intervention.¹⁵

Overview of EYC

EYC is a multilevel change initiative (see appendix A for the program's logic model). To build on youth strengths, EYC funds and supports 501(c)(3) community-based and Tribal organizations and coalitions/collaboratives across California to deliver youth-focused substance use prevention and early intervention programs. EYC aims to increase access to supportive relationships with mentors or peers, essential resources, skills, agency, and healthy behaviors among **youth participants** through mentorship and relationship building, leadership development, and civic engagement related to substance use issues or their root causes.

In addition to investing in youth programming, EYC enhances the capacity of **funded partner organizations** that serve young people through training, technical assistance, and organizational development. These efforts are expected to result in positive changes at a **community level** by catalyzing partnerships and engaging youth participants in shaping policies, systems, and environments to increase protective factors and reduce SUD.

EYC is a program of the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) funded through Proposition 64 California Cannabis Tax Fund, Allocation 3, Youth Education, Prevention, Early Intervention and Treatment Account. The Center at Sierra Health Foundation (The Center) is contracted to support EYC implementation and provides, directly or through subcontractors, training and technical assistance to help funded partners deliver programs effectively and increase their organizational capacity. Since the EYC program's launch in 2019, DHCS has awarded \$370.187 million through 517 grant awards over the course of seven rounds of funding.

Evaluation of EYC

In 2023, DHCS, through its contract with The Center, partnered with Education Northwest and Social Policy Research Associates to conduct a mixed-methods evaluation of the statewide EYC program (2023–2027).¹⁶ The first year of the evaluation (2023–2024) focused on foundational work, including refining the program logic model (see appendix A) and updating monitoring templates to support consistent data collection across all funded partners. The second year (2024–2025) focused on evaluating Round 3 funded partners whose grant cycles ended in spring 2025. The third year (2025–2027) will focus on Round 4 funded partners.

EYC funded partners vary in terms of their specific design, focus population, and primary program services.¹⁷ This evaluation report is intended to provide a point-in-time snapshot of program activities, outputs, and short-term and intermediate outcomes across the diverse programs funded in Round 3. The evaluation includes data from the statewide portfolio of partners, including an analysis of cumulative reports and a statewide youth survey completed by participants in each program's final year of EYC funding. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to track change over time or to evaluate the effectiveness of specific program-level strategies or models.

The EYC logic model (see appendix A) is the primary framework guiding this evaluation. The evaluation design is grounded in principles of culturally responsive evaluation and appreciative inquiry, an asset-based methodology that identifies and builds on program strengths.^{18, 19} The EYC logic model provides a road map for tracking the program's progress and effectiveness, generating data-driven insights, and developing actionable recommendations.

EYC Round 3 funded partners

This report focuses on the evaluation of EYC Round 3 funded partners. Round 3 included three funding tracks: Standard, Innovation, and Capacity Building. Each track involved

unique strategies for youth engagement, timelines, and award amounts. By offering different tracks, EYC ensures that funding is accessible to a wide range of community-based and Tribal organizations at different stages of development, while still prioritizing meaningful youth engagement across all program types. Table 1 provides an overview of the Round 3 funded programs.

Table 1. Overview of EYC Round 3 funded partners

Funding track	Timeline and duration	Funding amount per organization	Number of funded partners	Goal	Required strategies	
					Youth civic engagement	Mentorship and/or peer-led programming
Standard Track, Cohort 3	November 16, 2021– December 31, 2024 (37.5 months)	Up to \$1 million	58	Expand youth and young adult substance use prevention through policy, systems, and environmental change.	Yes	Yes
Innovation Track, Cohort 1	February 16, 2022– December 31, 2024 (34.5 months)	\$500,000– \$750,000	11	Replicate innovative strategies or new promising programs related to youth-led social justice, peer support, and mentoring.	Yes	Yes
Capacity Building Track, Cohort 2	May 16, 2022– December 31, 2024 (31.5 months)	\$75,000– \$400,000	34	Support grassroots organizations in building infrastructure to implement youth social justice programming that impacts policy and systems change.	Optional	Yes

Note: Six funded partners (three Standard Track, one Innovation Track, and two Capacity Building Track) had their awards terminated before the scheduled end date. The findings in this report are based on the 103 Round 3 funded partners that completed their funding cycles through December 2024.

Source: Elevate Youth California.

Evaluation questions

The evaluation is guided by a set of questions aligned with the EYC logic model. The questions focus on program activities and outcomes across multiple levels: youth participants, funded partners, and the broader community in locations throughout California. Table 2 maps each evaluation question to the logic model. For a detailed list of evaluation questions and subquestions, see table B-1 in appendix B.

Table 2. Alignment of evaluation questions with EYC logic model levels

Evaluation questions	Level of the EYC logic model
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is the EYC program reaching and serving?• To what extent has EYC been implemented as intended?	Program activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the overall experience of youth participating in EYC programming?• To what extent did the EYC program meet its intended outcomes for program participants?	Youth outputs and outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the overall experience of the funded partners' staff engaging youth participants?• To what extent did the EYC program meet its intended outcomes related to building capacity for organizations?	Funded partner outputs and outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What changes to prevent SUD have occurred in the policy landscape since EYC was implemented, if any?	Community outputs and outcomes

Source: Elevate Youth California evaluation plan (November 2023).

Evaluation methodology

Evaluation findings are drawn from multiple data sources, reflecting a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of program implementation and outcomes. Using diverse sources, the evaluation can capture both the measurable outcomes of EYC programming and the contextual, lived experiences of youth participants and funded partner staff members.

Data sources include focus groups and listening sessions with funded partner staff members, youth surveys, and youth photovoice focus groups, a participatory evaluation method in which youth use photography and stories to document their program experiences and perspectives.²⁰ The evaluation also includes reviews of progress and

cumulative reports submitted by funded partners. These data represent a single point in time; findings should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.





For additional information on the data sources, see appendix C.

Measuring success

The evaluation team used a structured evaluation framework (table 3) to assess progress toward key outcomes. The framework was applied across youth-level outcomes (e.g., substance use prevention knowledge and skills), organizational outcomes (e.g., funding sources), and systems-level outcomes (e.g., youth-identified policy goals). Outcomes were rated on a four-point scale: fully achieved, partially achieved, emerging, or not achieved, as summarized in table 3.

This approach drew on both quantitative and qualitative indicators and accounted for differences in implementation, engagement, and context across funded partners. By combining evidence from the youth survey, focus groups with youth and staff members, and partner reports, the evaluation team was able to assess not only whether outcomes were achieved but also the depth and quality of those achievements. Triangulating findings across data sources strengthened the validity of the conclusions and helped identify consistent patterns as well as meaningful variations across sites.

Table 3. EYC evaluation framework for Round 3 youth participants, funded partners, and community outcomes

Rating	Description	Quantitative indicators	Qualitative indicators
 Fully achieved	Outcome is clearly met across most or all participants. Outcomes are meaningful, consistent, and sustained.	80–100% of participants or programs demonstrate the outcome	Youth participants share specific examples of change or outcomes; consistent themes of success across data sources
 Partially achieved	Outcome is met for some participants or in some areas. Progress is evident but not uniform.	50–79% of participants or programs demonstrate the outcome	Mixed responses; progress noted with gaps; some inconsistencies in delivery or experiences
 Emerging	Early signs of progress are shown, but the outcome is not yet fully realized. Implementation may be uneven or in early stages.	25–49% of participants or programs demonstrate the outcome	Youth participants share learning or interest but with limited examples; staff members note early engagement or barriers
 Not achieved	Little or no evidence of progress toward the outcome. May require redesign or additional support.	Less than 25% of participants or programs demonstrate the outcome	Multiple examples of confusion, disengagement, or lack of relevance or minimal references across data sources

Source: Evaluation team.

Program Implementation

This section provides an overview of the youth served in EYC programs and the core programs of EYC funded partners. Reporting in this section relies on data from funded partner staff focus groups, listening sessions, and cumulative and progress reports. Qualitative responses from youth surveys are included to provide additional context.

Youth Served by EYC Programs

Funded partners reported on the number of new participants who successfully completed their programs. A new participant refers to a young person who first started to participate in EYC programming during the organization's grant period. A young person is considered to have successfully completed the program when they have completed the requirements to exit the program, which are defined by the funded partners providing youth services.²¹

Aggregated demographic data of youth participants from progress reports show that Round 3 funded partners reached and provided services to the intended priority groups, primarily youth of color and 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth between the ages of 12 and 26 impacted by the war on drugs.

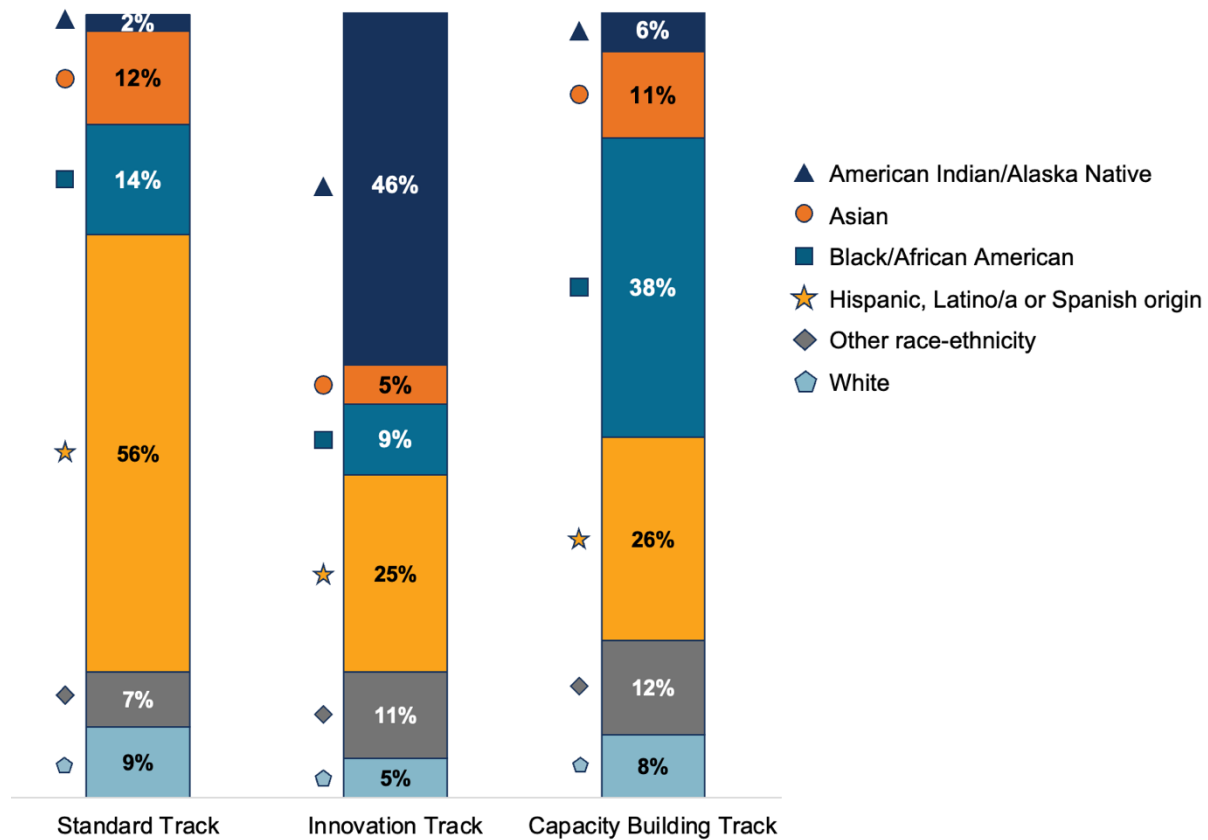
Youth of color made up more than 90 percent of EYC program participants

According to the aggregated demographic data from progress reports, 91 percent of new program participants self-identified as youth of color (91 percent in Standard Track, 94 percent in Innovation Track, and 91 percent in Capacity Building Track programs). Similarly, youth of color made up 92 percent of all youth who successfully completed their EYC program (91 percent in Standard Track, 95 percent in Innovation Track, and 92 percent in Capacity Building Track programs).²²

The racial-ethnic composition of program participants varied by funding track

Notably, American Indian/Alaska Native youth comprised 46 percent of youth who successfully completed programs within the Innovation Track (figure 1).²³ In the Standard Track, youth of Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin made up the largest share of young people who successfully completed programs (56 percent). Black or African American youth represented the largest group of program completers in the Capacity Building Track (38 percent).

Figure 1. The racial-ethnic backgrounds of youth who successfully completed EYC Round 3 programs varied by funding track



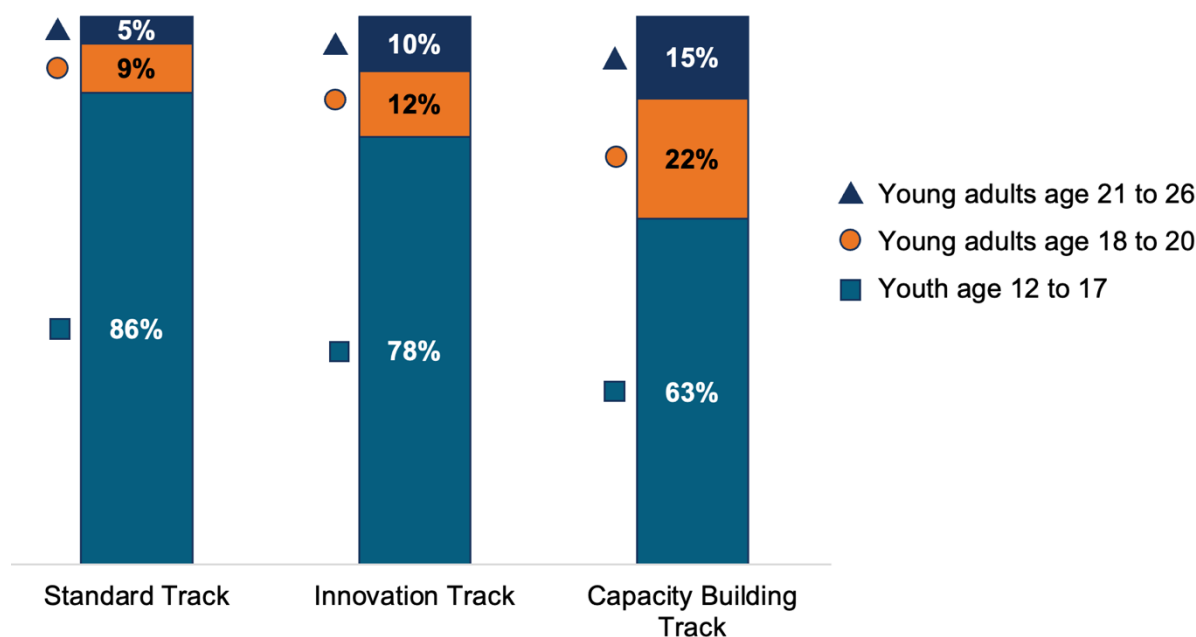
Note: N = 28,912 youth who successfully completed their EYC program and provided race-ethnicity data (17,949 Standard Track, 5,421 Innovation Track, 5,542 Capacity Building Track). “Other race-ethnicity” category includes Indigenous to Latin America, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, and other race/ethnicity not listed. Percentages represent the share of youth who successfully completed their programs within a specific funding track and racial-ethnic category. Due to rounding errors, bars may not equal 100%.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of aggregate demographic data from funded partner progress reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025).

While EYC funds were available to programs serving young people ages 12 to 26, most participants were between 12 and 17 years old

Eighty percent of all new program participants were ages 12 to 17 (83 percent in Standard Track, 83 percent in Innovation Track, and 68 percent in Capacity Building Track programs; see table D1 in appendix D). In addition, the majority of participants who successfully completed their program were ages 12 to 17 (86 percent in Standard Track, 78 percent in Innovation Track, and 63 percent in Capacity Building Track programs; see figure 2).

Figure 2. EYC Round 3 funded partners typically engaged youth ages 12 to 17



Note: N = 30,155 youth who successfully completed their EYC program and provided age group information (20,090 Standard Track, 4,598 Innovation Track, 5,467 Capacity Building Track). Percentages represent the share of youth who successfully completed their program within a specific funding track and age group category.

Source: Evaluation team's analysis of aggregate demographic data from funded partner progress reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025).

EYC Round 3 programs served youth who identify as 2S/LGBTQIA+

Young people who identify as 2S/LGBTQIA+ represented 6 percent of all new program participants (6 percent in Standard Track, 4 percent in Innovation Track, and 11 percent in Capacity Building Track programs; see table D1 in appendix D). Among program completers, 6 percent identified as 2S/LGBTQIA+ (6 percent in Standard Track, 6 percent in Innovation Track, and 8 percent in Capacity Building Track programs; see table D2 in appendix D).

Overall, 75 percent of youth successfully completed their EYC Round 3 program

According to aggregated demographic data of youth participants, EYC Round 3 funded partners across all three funding tracks served 51,074 new participants over the course of their grant. Of those participants, 38,453 were reported as successfully completing their program. Completion rates varied slightly by funding track: 75 percent in Standard Track, 83 percent in Innovation Track, and 70 percent in Capacity Building Track programs.

The actual number of youth participants who successfully completed the program may be different than reported, as some funded partners continued serving youth beyond the award

period, varied in how they tracked or defined completion, or faced data entry and reporting constraints that limited the documentation of program completers. Additionally, youth that aged out may not have been included in the demographic data. Due to variances in reporting, the difference between total youth participants and participants who successfully completed their program does not necessarily equal youth who unsuccessfully completed the program. See appendix D for more details on the youth participants served across EYC funding tracks.

Core Programming Provided to Youth

Funded partners were required to report on implementation of the following youth engagement strategies: youth civic engagement; leadership opportunities for policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change; mentorship/relationship-building; and/or peer-led support/programming. Core programs provided multiple/continuous services, support, or contact to the youth participants.

All Round 3 funded partners implemented EYC services as intended

All 58 Standard and 11 Innovation Track funded partners offered SUD prevention programming that focused on youth civic engagement and one other strategy, including mentorship or peer-led programming. Participants in these programs engaged in a variety of civic engagement activities, such as examining community issues, promoting youth-led solutions, and working with decision-makers to advance PSE changes that prevent SUD. All 34 Capacity Building Track funded partners reported providing SUD prevention education through mentorship/relationship-building and/or peer-led support/programming. As reflected in the quote below, youth experiences highlight a wide range of activities and opportunities for growth.

I assisted [in] researching the history of the war on drugs, historical trauma [experienced] by communities of color based on abusive policing, and ways to heal relationships by creating community connections. This research was presented to law enforcement officers from our [local] Sheriff's Department and District Attorney's office.

– Standard Track youth participant

Innovative Youth Engagement Strategies

One aim of EYC is to identify and promote strategies to improve SUD prevention in California. The Innovation Track focused on replicating innovative strategies related to youth-led social justice, peer support, and mentoring. The evaluation team’s analysis of funded partner cumulative report data indicates that Innovation Track funded partners delivered SUD prevention education through a range of holistic and culturally responsive approaches. The three most common strategies used by Innovation Track programs were:

1. Strengthening young people’s cultural identity through creative and cultural healing practices.
2. Increasing civic engagement through media-driven awareness efforts.
3. Fostering family and community partnerships to support collective action on youth mental health and substance use prevention.

See box 1 for examples of these strategies.

Box 1. Common youth engagement strategies by Innovation Track funded partners

- **Creative and cultural healing practices.** Integrating arts, music, storytelling, and culturally grounded traditions into healing and youth civic engagement (e.g., canoe launch, drum making, spoken word)
- **Media and public awareness.** Using youth-developed media (e.g., videos, podcasts, documentaries, social media posts) to share lived experiences and promote prevention messages
- **Community and family engagement.** Facilitating healing circles with youth and family members, workshops, town halls, and outreach through trusted community networks

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of Round 3 funded partner cumulative reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025) and funded partner focus groups (fall 2024).

Youth Outcomes and Experiences


The EYC logic model (see appendix A) proposes that participation in EYC core programming may result in a range of short and intermediate outcomes. In this section, we summarize progress for Round 3 funded partners on a set of priority outcomes indicators (table 4) identified in consultation with EYC staff. We also describe in more detail progress on a broader set of youth experiences and outcomes aligned with the EYC logic model: (1) substance use prevention knowledge, skills, and healthy behaviors; (2) youth-adult mentorship and increased agency; (3) leadership development and empowerment; and (4) civic engagement and leadership for PSE change. We close with a description of promising youth engagement practices that may support positive youth outcomes. This analysis draws primarily from youth surveys and photovoice focus groups. Additionally, the section includes perspectives from funded partners, collected through focus groups, to provide contextual insight into promising practices.

Survey Participants

A total of 1,534 young people from 94 EYC Round 3 programs completed the youth survey. Among the survey respondents, 827 (54 percent) participated in Standard Track programs, 252 (16 percent) in Innovation Track programs, and 455 (30 percent) in Capacity Building Track programs. The evaluation team also engaged 34 youth participants in photovoice focus groups, with 15 (44 percent) in Standard Track programs, 7 (21 percent) in Innovation Track programs, and 12 (35 percent) in Capacity Building Track programs. For a detailed description of each data source and its role in the evaluation, see appendix C.

Table 4. Evaluation findings for EYC Round 3: Youth experiences and outcomes by priority indicator

Priority logic model indicator	Evaluation findings	Illustrative quotes
Increased number of youth who understand that substance use is harmful	 <p>Fully achieved</p> <p>Between 92 and 96% of all survey participants reported increased confidence and knowledge in avoiding substance use, understanding its impact on their communities, and knowing where to seek support.</p>	<p>“Youth substance use has been an increasing problem in my community. This has led to a rise in substance-related suspensions which furthers the school-to-prison pipeline. I did extensive research on alternative to suspension programs for schools and presented it to my school administrators for implementation.”</p>
Increased number of youth who have at least one stable, caring relationship with an adult/older youth mentor or peer	 <p>Fully achieved</p> <p>Between 77 and 89% of all survey participants reported having a mentor in their program who provided emotional support, problem-solving assistance, and goal-setting help.</p>	<p>“I learned more about my leadership style and how to take pride in my culture in leadership. I experienced having my very first mentor in the program, and it was a great experience learning from her. I gained a sense of belonging in my community I never really had experienced before.”</p>
Increased number of youth who perceived themselves as being more empowered and confident	 <p>Partially achieved</p> <p>Between 60 and 76% of all survey participants reported frequently taking on leadership roles, contributing ideas, and actively participating in discussions within their programs.</p>	<p>“A lot of us at-risk youth don’t get the support we need, and we face challenges like unstable families, limited access to school, and being around trauma or drugs. That’s why I work ... mentoring and advocating for other young people in [EYC program]. I also run sessions to share knowledge, build resilience, and help my peers develop leadership skills that can keep kids on a positive path, stay away from drugs, and make real changes in their lives.”</p>

Priority logic model indicator	Evaluation findings	Illustrative quotes
Increased number of youth who demonstrated ability to present on and engage in justice and equity issues locally and beyond	 <p>Partially achieved</p> <p>Between 40 and 79% of survey participants in the Standard and Innovation Tracks reported engaging in civic engagement activities, ranging from learning about and discussing social justice issues to supporting community-driven change.</p>	<p>“I’ve seen firsthand the tension between young people of color and law enforcement in my community. I know trust is key because it makes people feel safe where they live. I researched the history of the war on drugs, the trauma caused by abusive policing, and ways to rebuild relationships through community connections. I shared what I learned with officers from our sheriff’s department and district attorney’s office.”</p>

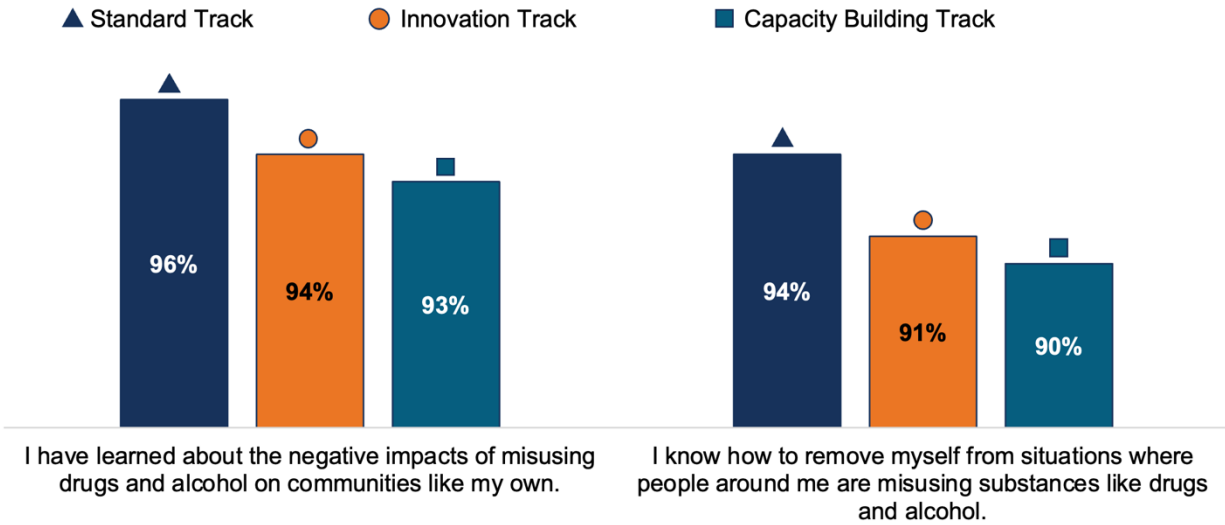
Note: Percentage ranges are based on the lowest and highest item-level results from the youth survey across all participants (see table E1 for item-level results on youth substance use prevention knowledge and skills; table E2 for youth–adult mentorship/relationship-building and support from program staff; table E3 for youth leadership development; and table E4 for opportunities for youth civic and social justice engagement). Results in tables E1–E3 include youth from all funding tracks, while table E4 includes results for youth in the Standard and Innovation funding tracks. The evaluation framework used to assess youth outcomes is provided in table 3.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of the EYC Youth Survey 2024 and photovoice focus groups (fall 2024).

Substance Use Prevention Knowledge, Skills, and Healthy Behaviors

Youth survey results show overwhelmingly positive outcomes related to substance use prevention across all funding tracks, with minimal variation across tracks (figure 3). Between 90 and 96 percent of participants reported increased confidence and knowledge in avoiding substance use, understanding its effects on their communities, and knowing where to find support due to their participation in EYC programs.

Figure 3. More than 90 percent of all youth survey respondents reported that they gained knowledge and skills in substance use prevention as a result of their participation in EYC Round 3 programming



Note: Percentages reflect the proportion of youth who responded “agree” or “strongly agree” to the prompt: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself? As a result of my participation in my EYC program ...” For the item “I have learned about the negative impacts of misusing drugs and alcohol on communities like my own,” the percentages are based on 634 respondents in the Standard Track, 192 in the Innovation Track, and 328 in the Capacity Building Track. For the item “I know how to remove myself from situations where people around me are using substances like drugs and alcohol,” the percentages are based on 621 respondents in the Standard Track, 186 in the Innovation Track, and 321 in the Capacity Building Track. Additional details on response distributions are provided in table E-1 in appendix E.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of the EYC Youth Survey 2024.

EYC participation helped youth prevent substance use and adopt healthier behaviors

As part of the survey, participants were asked to describe a community problem and how they contributed to addressing it through their EYC program. Of those who responded, 196 young people (27 percent) across all funding tracks identified substance use as a major concern and shared examples of their participation in prevention-focused programming.

These responses highlight progress toward the intermediate logic model outcome of increased healthy behaviors. Participants described substance use as interconnected with broader community challenges, such as poverty, housing issues, and mental health. Youth reported gaining knowledge about substance use disorders, which supported their ability to make healthier choices and avoid risky behaviors. They also engaged in research, developed educational materials, and actively raised awareness. By presenting their work

to peers, community members, and decision-makers, participants contributed to addressing systemic health disparities affecting communities of color and underserved populations, demonstrating both personal behavior change and community-level impact.

A community problem is the lack of support for individuals recovering from mental health and substance use challenges. Many people in recovery feel isolated, which can make it harder for them to heal and stay on track. To address this, I co-led a project where we created and sent personalized caring cards to people in recovery. We partnered with community organizations and trained volunteers to write messages that fostered belonging, acceptance, and hope.

– Capacity Building Track youth participant

Young people were motivated by a strong sense of responsibility in their communities

In photovoice focus groups, young people in every session expressed a desire to create meaningful change on these issues, not just for themselves, but for friends, family members, and neighbors who had been impacted by substance use and the policies surrounding it. This sense of duty led them to join EYC programs, where they learned about the broader systemic factors impacting their communities (e.g., disproportionate health disparities among communities of color) and found opportunities to channel their awareness into action.

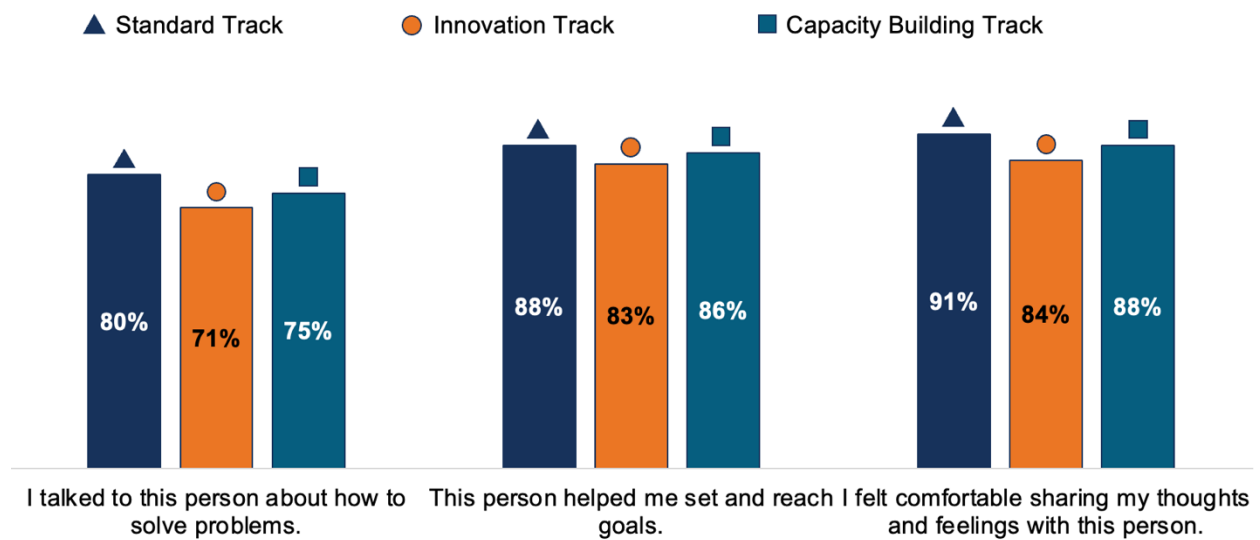
Before joining EYC, I knew that there was a larger issue with drugs. It was nothing new to me because I saw it in my community ... Fentanyl overdose is a problem everywhere. But I knew that I wanted to do something about it, whatever I could, because it was all around me. This is what motivated me to join.

– Standard Track youth participant

Youth-Adult Mentorship and Increased Agency

Young people in EYC programs across all funding tracks experienced meaningful and supportive relationships with adults in their programs. Between 71 and 91 percent of participants reported engaging a mentor in their EYC program to solve problems, set and achieve goals, and receive emotional support. Across funding tracks, youth participants reported feeling slightly more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with a trusted adult in their EYC program than seeking problem-solving help from that adult (figure 4).

Figure 4. Between 71 and 91 percent of youth from all Round 3 funding tracks reported engaging an EYC mentor



Note: Percentages reflect the proportion of youth who responded “often” or “sometimes” to the question “Within the last year, how frequently did the following happen with the one person older than you that you can go to for support in your EYC program?” For the item “I talked to this person about how to solve problems,” the percentages are based on 566 respondents in the Standard Track, 151 in the Innovation Track, and 269 in the Capacity Building Track. For the item “This person helped me set and reach goals,” the percentages are based on 615 respondents in the Standard Track, 176 in the Innovation Track, and 306 in the Capacity Building Track. For the item “I felt comfortable sharing my thoughts and feelings with this person,” the percentages are based on 642 respondents in the Standard Track, 179 in the Innovation Track, and 316 in the Capacity Building Track. Additional details on response distributions are provided in table E-2 in appendix E. Youth who participated in the EYC survey may not have received youth-adult mentorship opportunities because funded partners could choose to provide peer-led support and leadership programming and/or mentorship/relationship-building.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of the EYC Youth Survey 2024.

EYC mentors gave youth support and guidance, helping increase their agency around future college and career pathways

Survey participants were asked to describe their favorite EYC activity, event, or project. While some youth described program activities and events, some identified their program mentors. According to youth, their mentors offered valuable resources such as homework help, guidance in understanding complex processes like grants, and emotional support. Notably, over 80 percent of youth across all Round 3 funding tracks reported that their mentors helped them set and achieve personal goals—strong evidence that mentorship significantly enhances their sense of agency and empowers them to pursue future college and career pathways with confidence and direction.

We discuss the issues we face as youth in our community. It feels really therapeutic to express myself, especially with a supportive mentor who offers guidance and positive feedback.

– Standard Track youth participant

Program mentors offered practical advice but also helped young people build resilience

In photovoice focus group sessions, youth described how supportive connections fostered a sense of accountability, as mentors helped youth set and achieve personal goals for after high school and community-based goals related to their civic engagement efforts. Youth credited their mentors with keeping them engaged in civic activities to promote substance use prevention education, while also reinforcing their commitment to creating positive change in their communities.

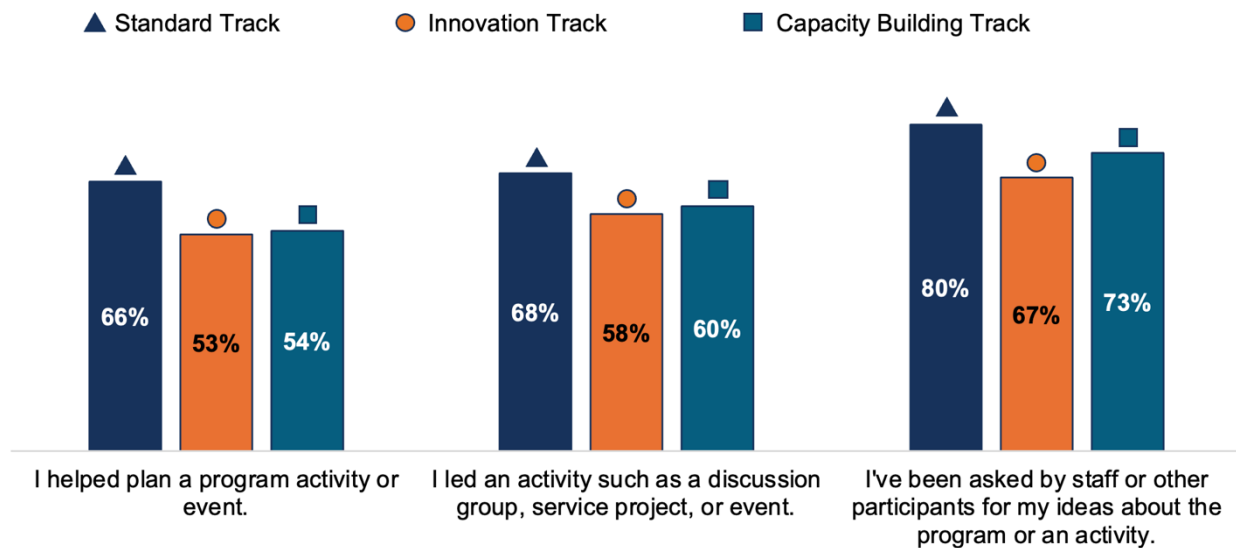
The mentorship is really important to me because not only is there someone to help you, but there's someone you can talk to when you don't feel like you can talk to anyone else. There's someone who will correct you when you're wrong. I don't want to say a parental figure, but it's like an older sibling, someone who will still steer you in the right direction.

– Capacity Building Track youth participant

Leadership Development and Empowerment

Overall survey results suggest that more than half of the respondents in EYC programs engaged in leadership development opportunities. Between 53 and 80 percent of survey respondents reported engaging in opportunities within their EYC programs that empowered them to take initiative, contribute ideas, and lead activities. Differences emerged by funding track: Standard Track program participants reported engaging in leadership development activities more consistently than participants in Innovation and Capacity Building Track programs (figure 5). Note that all the youth that completed the survey may not have received leadership opportunities because funded partners could choose to provide peer-led support and leadership programming and/or mentorship/relationship building.

Figure 5. Youth leadership engagement was highest in EYC Round 3 Standard Track programs, with similar but lower levels of engagement in Innovation and Capacity Building Track programs



Note: Percentages reflect the proportion of youth who responded “often” or “sometimes” to the question “How frequently did the following happen at your EYC program within the last year?” For the item “I helped plan a program activity or event,” the percentages are based on 493 respondents in the Standard Track, 120 in the Innovation Track, and 224 in the Capacity Building Track. For the item “I led an activity such as a discussion group, service project, or event,” the percentages are based on 506 respondents in the Standard Track, 131 in the Innovation Track, and 251 in the Capacity Building Track. For the item “I’ve been asked by staff or other participants for my ideas about the program or an activity,” the percentages are based on 601 respondents in the Standard Track, 149 in the Innovation Track, and 305 in the Capacity Building Track. Additional details on response distributions are provided in table E-3 in appendix E.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of the EYC Youth Survey 2024.

Youth strengthened their leadership skills through culturally responsive programming and civic engagement opportunities, contributing to increased perceived empowerment

When asked about their favorite EYC activities, youth highlighted experiences that supported their leadership growth, including leadership training, serving as peer mentors, and learning about their cultural heritage to engage in civic action. Many reported that their program helped them recognize and develop leadership abilities they had not previously identified, reflecting greater confidence and a sense of agency in their own growth and contributions.

I participated in the [EYC program], and it was one of the most impactful experiences. I learned more about my leadership style, myself, how to take pride in my culture in leadership, and more about community work.

– Standard Track youth participant



This is me getting my camera ready for our next project. These are the products that are being sold across the street from our school and most people don't know that it's happening.

We talked to students, police, and [local] agencies to get their perspective. We feel it's important to understand that the easier any of these products are to get, the more likely students are to use them.

– Innovation Track youth participant



Through EYC programs, youth increased skills in communication, teamwork, and problem solving, which enhanced their sense of empowerment

By connecting with peers, mentors, and community leaders in presentations and civic engagement activities, youth participants expanded their networks and built confidence in public speaking. Planning and leading community initiatives, workshops, and awareness campaigns allowed youth to take ownership of projects, make decisions, and see the results of their contributions. Many participants reported feeling proud of serving on youth councils, guiding peer discussions, and co-designing program activities, demonstrating increased agency and confidence in their ability to influence both their own development and their communities.

I presented at a conference, and my badge had three different little stickers: staff, youth board member, and presenter. I was doing a lot! But it was because my program helped me become a leader and take initiative.

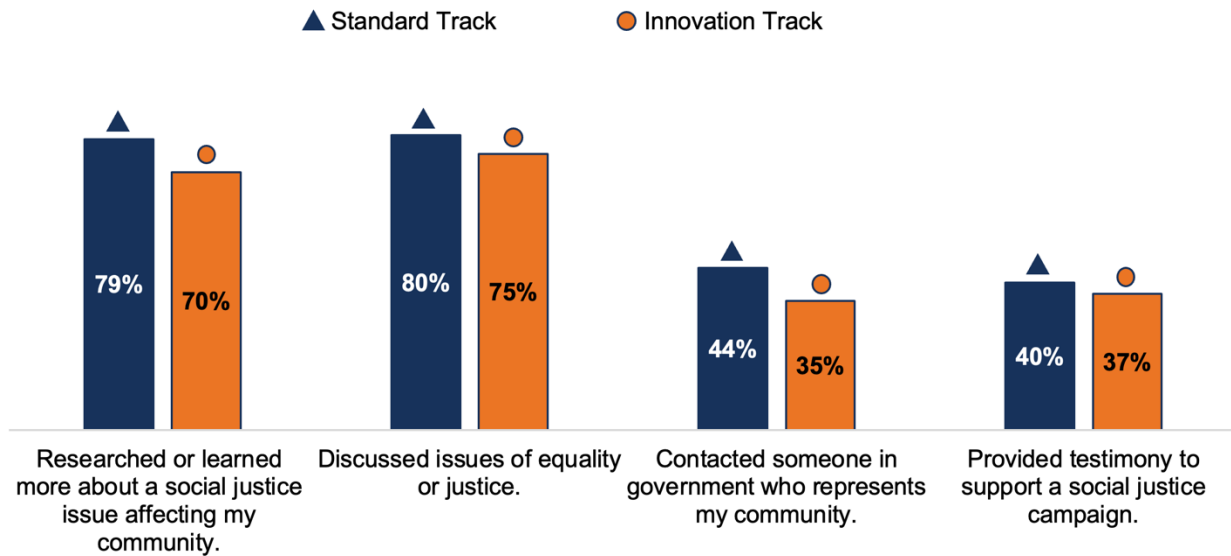
– Standard Track youth participant

Civic Engagement and Leadership for PSE Change

In the survey, youth were asked about the opportunity to engage in varied civic engagement activities (e.g., research a community issue, contact someone in government) in their EYC programs. Capacity Building Track funded partners were not required to deliver youth civic engagement programming; therefore, youth from those programs are excluded from this analysis.

Across funding tracks, funded partners most commonly reported having opportunities to learn about and research community issues, while less than half reported having opportunities to take direct action to address these concerns (figure 6).²⁴

Figure 6. Access to youth civic engagement activities varied, with some opportunities more widely available across EYC Round 3 Standard and Innovation Track programs



Note: Percentages reflect the proportion of youth who responded “yes” to the question “Did you have the opportunity to do the following activities in your EYC program?” For the item “Researched or learned more about a social justice issue affecting my community,” the percentages are based on 527 respondents in the Standard Track and 142 in the Innovation Track. For the item “Discussed issues of equality or justice,” the percentages are based on 537 respondents in the Standard Track and 152 in the Innovation Track. For the item “Contacted someone in government who represents my community,” the percentages are based on 296 respondents in the Standard Track and 72 in the Innovation Track. For the item “Provided testimony to support a social justice campaign,” the percentages are based on 267 respondents in the Standard Track and 76 in the Innovation Track. Additional details on response distributions are provided in table E-4 in appendix E.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of the EYC Youth Survey 2024.

Engaging in civic engagement and social justice activities promoted a sense of community responsibility and stronger connections to peers and adults

In photovoice focus groups, youth described issues impacting their communities and the ways they took action to address these issues through canvassing, attending rallies, and participating in policy discussions. They used public comment opportunities at city council and school board meetings to share personal stories and advocate for change on substance use prevention and related issues (e.g., environmental justice, immigrant support, behavioral health). Through these efforts, youth not only contributed to meaningful community change but also built networks; strengthened relationships with mentors; explored career pathways; and developed research skills by conducting interviews, analyzing data, and presenting findings to peers, community members, and decision-makers.



[The picture shows] a time I felt proud when I got to go to the school board and tried to make changes and help my peers.

– Standard Track youth participant

EYC programs offered unexpected benefits, building youth creativity, cultural connection, and self-efficacy

Youth participants developed creative and marketing abilities, such as filming and graphic design, by producing multimedia educational content for SUD prevention. They appreciated that EYC programs balanced education and civic engagement with cultural and social events (e.g., Día de los Muertos events, Native American ceremonies and drum making, Black cowboy parade, Hmong New Year), making their experiences both meaningful and enjoyable. Youth also described experiencing greater self-efficacy and self-worth and discovering strengths they had not previously recognized.

Promising Practices for Youth Engagement

To better understand the factors contributing to youth outcomes, the evaluation team explored effective strategies shared by funded partners for engaging young people in SUD prevention education in their EYC programs.

Creating safe, supportive spaces helps youth build trust, experience a sense of belonging, and stay engaged

A key theme that emerged from funded partners across all funding tracks was the importance of creating safe, supportive spaces where youth feel seen, valued, and supported and are more likely to actively participate and stay engaged. Funded partners suggested that these efforts were key to building trust; fostering a sense of belonging; and ensuring that youth could fully access the resources, relationships, and opportunities that support their success.

During focus groups, funded partners shared a range of strategies they used to create safe and supportive environments for youth (box 2).

Box 2. Funded partners' strategies for creating safe and supportive environments

- **Translating** materials and employing **bilingual or multilingual staff members** to ensure accessibility
- Training and elevating youth leaders into **peer leadership roles**
- Reimagining and **adapting physical spaces** to be more accessible, youth friendly, and culturally responsive
- Providing emotional support through **trauma-informed approaches** such as healing circles

Source: Evaluation team's analysis of Round 3 funded partner cumulative reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025) and funded partner focus groups (fall 2024).

Indeed, young people expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be in community with their peers. They described these spaces as safe and supportive, helping them process challenges, feel less isolated, and build trust with peers and adults.

I really enjoyed both sharing space with folks and hearing people's dreams for a brighter future. It felt healing and motivating to see so many others who also care deeply for one another and want to see the community come together. It was inspiring, and I think a lot of folks walked away feeling seen and heard.

– Standard Track youth participant

Building trust with youth participants is time intensive but essential for engagement



A few funded partners emphasized the significant time and effort required to build rapport and trust with youth, particularly those from specialized populations such as unaccompanied migrant minors and youth in foster care. One partner reflected that systems-involved youth frequently carry additional burdens that can limit their participation (e.g., limited access to resources, system-related instability such as court involvement that interrupts youths' routines). Despite these challenges, partners consistently viewed time-intensive relationship building as a vital investment. They recognized that trust and connection are foundational to meaningful youth development and long-term outcomes.

Funded Partner Outcomes and Experiences

This section has two primary areas of focus: the outcomes of funded partners across all tracks (using insights derived from focus groups and cumulative reports) and changes for funded partners in the Capacity Building Track, which was established to enhance organizational infrastructure, support program development, and prepare organizations for future expansion.

A summary of progress on funded partner and organizational outcomes from the EYC logic model (see appendix A) and key results are provided in table 5.

Table 5. EYC Round 3 evaluation findings: Funded partner outcomes by priority indicator

Priority logic model indicator	Evaluation findings	Illustrative quotes
Increased amount of EYC partners receiving funding from a variety of sources	 <p>Emerging</p> <p>92% of funded partners plan to continue their EYC programs; however, only 43% reported having multiple funding sources to sustain their youth-focused programming.</p>	<p>“We are actively seeking additional grant opportunities to further enhance our programs and initiatives. At present, we have active grant contracts with several reputable organizations at the federal, state, and local levels that are vital to our efforts.”</p>
Enhanced finance operations; staff development, retention, and capacity; youth voice programming; and data skills among funded partner staff	 <p>Emerging</p> <p>All Capacity Building Track funded partners reported progress in strengthening their organizational capacity; however, definitive conclusions about their achievements cannot be drawn due to limited available data.</p>	<p>“Key milestones achieved include onboarding a fundraising platform, developing a donor stewardship plan, and launching both a fundraising committee and a finance committee.”</p>

Note: The evaluation framework used to assess funded partner outcomes is provided in table 3.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of Round 3 funded partner cumulative reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025) and funded partner focus groups (fall 2024).

Expansion of Funding Sources

EYC supported organizational capacity building among funded partners through provision of funding alongside purposeful training and technical assistance. For example, in partnership with the subcontractor Leverage Point Development, EYC offered a seven-part series with individual coaching on nonprofit management, fund development, grant writing, leadership and management, design thinking, and strategic planning. Leverage Point Development also delivered a four-part series on grant writing fundamentals and developed both a grant writing toolkit and a strategic planning toolkit to further strengthen organizational capacity. Additionally, the Nonprofit Finance Fund, a subcontracted technical assistance provider, conducted a four-part series on connecting finances to mission, financial planning, and cash flow management.

To evaluate these efforts, the evaluation team examined funded partner cumulative reports to assess the extent to which programs planned to continue their work after the funding cycle and to achieve the goal of securing multiple funding sources for sustainability.

Ninety-two percent of funded partners planned to continue their EYC programs; however, this was primarily through one funding source

Ninety-five funded partners in Round 3 planned to continue their EYC programs. This includes 53 Standard Track programs, 10 Innovation Track programs, and 32 Capacity Building Track programs. Of these 95 funded partners, 48 (51 percent) identified a single source of funding to sustain their services. A total of 41 funded partners (43 percent) across all tracks reported having two or more sources of funding. Finally, six funded partners (6 percent) reported plans to sustain their programming but did not provide information on funding sources.

Partners reported a mix of funding sources to sustain their SUD programs, with specific examples highlighted in box 3. The most frequently cited funding source was the EYC Round 6 grant (2025–2027): 66 Round 3 funded partners (64 percent) received the award.

Box 3. Examples of sources of funding for sustained programming identified by Round 3 funded partners

- EYC Round 6 grant (2025–2027)
- **Philanthropic foundations.** Vera Long Foundation, Ronald S. Naito Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Schultz Family Foundation
- **Public/private organizations and partnerships.** Native Services, Boys and Girls Club of America, The California Endowment, The California Accountable Communities for Health Initiative (CACHI), Save the Children
- **Local, state, and federal grants.** Solano County Public Health grant, City of Oceanside Drug Free Community grant, The Office of Minority Health, Substance Use Block Grant (SUBG), State Opioid Response (SOR), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Drug Free Grants, Project Cal-Well
- **Corporate sponsorships.** Chase Bank, Edison International, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, NYX/L'Oreal, AT&T
- **Partnerships with schools and school districts.** Santa Barbara School District, University of California Davis, Twin Rivers Unified School District
- In-kind donations and fundraising

Source: Evaluation team's analysis of Round 3 funded partner cumulative reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025).

Eight percent of all funded partners did not plan to continue their EYC programs after the grant cycle ends

Among the funded partners not planning to continue their EYC programs, five were from the Standard Track, one from the Innovation Track, and two from the Capacity Building Track. Most cited lack of funding as the primary reason, while two funded partners pointed to shifts in organizational focus or priority youth groups. One partner emphasized that continuing programming could pose risks for youth, particularly undocumented youth, in navigating public-facing roles. Protecting youth from potential harm took precedence over broader program participation.

Organizational Capacity Building

Partners funded through the Capacity Building Track utilized EYC support to enhance their organizational infrastructure. Many engaged in training and coaching opportunities offered by EYC focused on skills related to fundraising, such as grant writing, strategic planning, and using a grant writing toolkit. In cumulative reports, these partners shared the benefits

they derived from these supports and outlined their objectives for improving organizational capacity. All 34 Capacity Building Track funded partners shared examples of progress in three main areas: (1) staff hiring, training, and development; (2) organizational strategy and data capacity; and (3) partnerships.

Staff development was the most common organizational capacity-building strategy. Nineteen Capacity Building Track funded partners cited efforts to build staff skills. Training topics included trauma-informed and culturally responsive care, SUD prevention, and policy development to support youth programming. Thirteen funded partners hired new staff members to enhance service delivery, and some promoted youth into leadership roles within their organizations. Six organizations hired and onboarded leadership or administrative staff.

We successfully onboarded key leadership roles, including the Executive Director, CFO, and COO, strengthening the organization's management and operational structure.

– Capacity Building Track funded partner staff member

[We] hosted cultural competency workshops for staff, focusing on understanding the cultural backgrounds and traditions of the communities served.

– Capacity Building Track funded partner staff member

Funded partners focused on the development of organizational strategy and data capacity

Eleven Capacity Building Track organizations used their EYC funds to identify organizational strategies and develop strategic plans. Seven funded partners enhanced their funding strategies by receiving training and support in grant seeking and proposal writing. Seven organizations implemented systems and platforms to support staff in collecting and tracking participant information, with the goal of strengthening evaluation and improving program outcomes.

Staff participated in retreats to develop a five-year strategic plan, outlining our top three priorities and objectives. This plan serves as a guiding framework for our organizational direction.

– Capacity Building Track funded partner staff member

[We] developed a centralized data collection system that ensures better tracking, reporting, and program evaluation. With the appointment of a new operations manager, we are now able to streamline data integration across all youth programs, ensuring alignment with objectives and measurable impact assessment.

– Capacity Building Track funded partner staff member

Expanded partnerships strengthened organizational capacity by increasing access to expertise, resources, and service delivery opportunities

Six partners expanded their reach and improved results by forming new partnerships or deepening existing ones, for example, by coordinating referrals; sharing spaces; and aligning programming with schools, community-based organizations, or employers. These partnerships allowed funded partners to serve more youth, offer more comprehensive supports, and reduce strain on internal staff. Additionally, five organizations hired external consultants to support their organizational well-being, including assistance with staff development, strategic planning, and internal systems, further strengthening their capacity to sustain and scale their work.

With the help of the grant, we engaged an accounting firm to improve financial management and oversight, ensuring compliance and fostering long-term sustainability.

– Capacity Building Track funded partner staff member

Community Outcomes

This section highlights community-level outcomes achieved by EYC Round 3 funded partners. Community outcomes reflect measurable **PSE changes**^{5,6} that go beyond individual participation to create lasting conditions for youth health, safety, and well-being. These structural outcomes connect directly to EYC's long-term goals of increasing protective factors for SUD prevention, reducing harms and risks associated with substance use, addressing disparities, and shifting narratives about youth most impacted by the war on drugs (see box 4).

Box 4. Description of policy, systems, and environmental changes in SUD prevention


- **Policy change** occurs when a new law, rule, or regulation is created or an existing one is revised at the school, city, county, or state level. *Example: A school district changes its suspension policy so that students found using substances are referred to counseling instead of being suspended.*
- **Systems change** happens when public and/or community-based organizations or agencies adjust how they work together, make decisions, or deliver services. It may refer to an organizational policy change or a change in processes or procedures of operations. *Example: Health providers and funded partners establish a shared referral system so that young people at risk of a SUD get connected to support more quickly.*
- **Environmental change** refers to modifications in the physical or social environment that make healthy behavior easier or safer. *Example: A city approves funding to add more youth-friendly public spaces, like recreation centers or sober hangouts, where young people can gather in safe environments.*

Source: Education Northwest.

Standard and Innovation Track funded partners reported on their **PSE activities** and progress toward implementing **PSE goals** to achieve community-level change.^{25, 26} All Standard and Innovation Track funded partners pursued at least one PSE goal, with some advancing multiple goals. Across 69 funded partners, 101 PSE goals were identified. While several goals directly addressed SUD prevention, many focused on broader systemic and environmental conditions that help youth thrive in communities disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs. These included expanding access to safe spaces, mentorship, education, and culturally relevant resources.

Progress reported in funded partner cumulative reports offered insights into the strategies used to advance PSE change, including the extent to which youth were actively engaged in shaping PSE goals. The reporting in this section draws on qualitative data from funded partners and youth. Table 6 summarizes progress on priority community outcomes as outlined in the EYC logic model. For more details on PSE activity types and youth involvement, see appendix F.

Table 6. Key EYC Round 3 evaluation finding: Community outcomes by logic model indicator

Priority logic model indicator	Evaluation finding	Illustrative quotes
Policy, systems, and environmental changes to increase protective factors (e.g., safe spaces, resources, support systems, community belonging) or reduce harms and risk associated with substance use	 <p>Emerging</p> <p>All Standard and Innovation Track funded partners reported implementing PSE activities to advance community-level outcomes. While progress is evident, the evaluation did not assess population-level changes, so broader community awareness and engagement cannot be confirmed.</p>	<p>“Youth participated in cohort sessions to learn about themselves, their power, and ultimately how state government works. They also directly [educated] lawmakers, contributed public comments, and led advocacy efforts. Youth demonstrated their leadership in advancing policy goals.”</p>

Note: The evaluation framework used to assess youth outcomes is provided in table 3.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of Round 3 funded partner cumulative reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025) and funded partner focus groups (fall 2024).

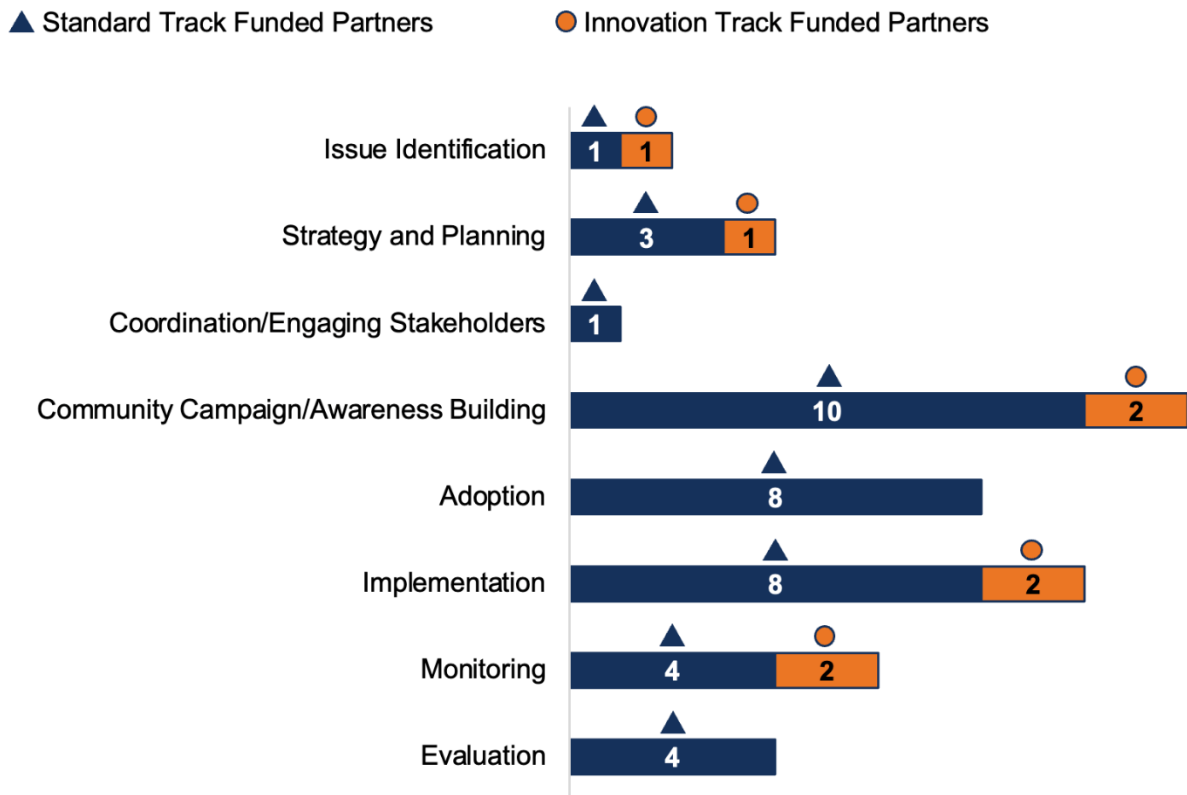
Funded Partner Efforts Toward PSE Goals

To better understand the efforts of Standard and Innovation Track funded partners in advancing their PSE goals, the evaluation team examined funded partners’ reported phase of PSE change at the time they submitted their cumulative reports. Funded partners reported on both the PSE change that they were pursuing and the phase of change their work had reached, ranging from issue identification and planning to awareness building, adoption, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. These phases help explain how PSE change happens over time. By tracking progress at each phase, the evaluation can capture important early efforts, like planning and community action, that lay the foundation for lasting changes in policies, systems, and environments. For more details on PSE phases, see appendix G.

Among funded partners with a single PSE goal, most reported being in the community campaign and awareness stage

The predominant portion of funded partners was engaged in community campaigns, with potential subsequent efforts directed toward adopting and implementing initiatives. Several funded partners reported efforts to monitor and evaluate PSE goals (figure 7). These findings suggest that funded partners are making meaningful progress toward fully implementing their PSE goal. The emphasis on community campaigns indicates that programs are successfully engaging youth and community members in awareness and advocacy efforts, laying the groundwork for the implementation of PSE goals.

Figure 7. Most Standard and Innovation Track funded partners with a single PSE goal reported being in the awareness building, adoption, or implementation phase by the end of their funding cycle



Note: N = 47 EYC Round 3 funded partners reporting one PSE goal (39 Standard and eight Innovation Track funded partners). Bars refer to the number of funded partners.

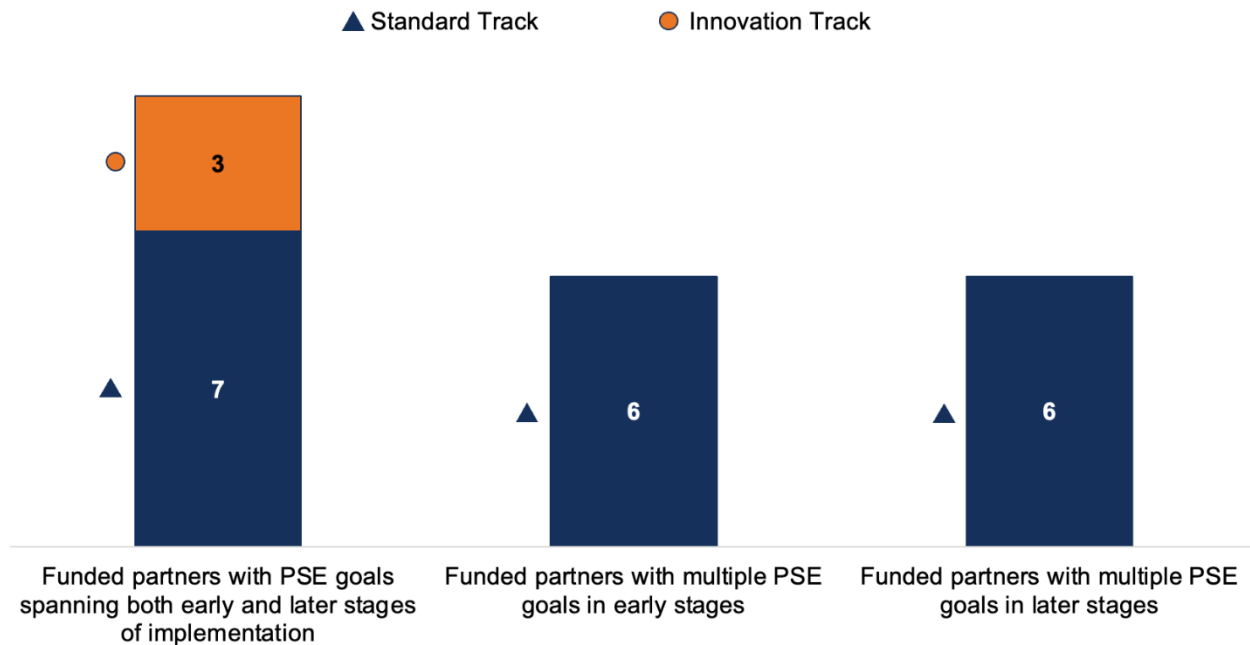
Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of EYC Round 3 cumulative reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025).

Partners with multiple PSE goals were advancing work across varied stages of implementation

Among the 22 Standard and Innovation Track partners reporting two to three PSE goals, the evaluation team examined how these goals were distributed across implementation phases. Key patterns include: (1) goals spanning both early and later stages, (2) multiple goals concentrated in early stages, and (3) multiple goals concentrated in later stages.

This is an important finding because it demonstrates that funded partners are not only initiating new PSE goals but also continuing to work toward existing PSE goals, reflecting both breadth and depth in their overall impact (figure 8).

Figure 8. Round 3 funded partners with multiple PSE goals reported varied phases of implementation



Note: N = 19 Standard and three Innovation Track funded partners that reported two to three PSE goals. Early phases of PSE change = issue identification, strategy and planning, coordination, and community campaign. Later phases of PSE change = adoption, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Bars refer to the number of funded partners.

Source: Evaluation team's analysis of Round 3 funded partner cumulative reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025).

Youth Engagement in Working Toward PSE Goals

Youth participants played active roles in advancing EYC program PSE goals across all phases of PSE change (issue identification through evaluation).²⁷

Youth involvement in **issue identification** and **strategy planning**

Youth participants developed knowledge of community challenges and learned skills related to PSE change and advocacy. Activities included participating in and facilitating listening sessions, conducting research on issues such as substance use among BIPOC communities, and identifying PSE goals. Youth described understanding the policy process, including how systemic change is implemented and how to educate local and state representatives.

I think there is always a conversation about how Latinos are underrepresented in government and positions of power. Knowing about the governmental process and how to be a better Latino leader will be helpful.

– Standard Track youth participant

Program participants were trained on topics including what substance use prevention is, advocating for change, and youth advocacy 101. These students developed and delivered a presentation to school staff and administrators on supportive, restorative, and preventive alternatives to punitive disciplinary actions for students using substances. They also advocated for Narcan to be readily accessible in all classrooms.

– Standard Track funded partner staff member

Youth involvement in **engaging interest holders** and **community campaigns**

Youth participants raised awareness and mobilized peers, community members, and decision-makers through events, rallies, presentations, social media campaigns, and educational materials such as flyers and short documentaries. Their efforts addressed a wide range of issues impacting their peers' well-being and future opportunities, including the risks and long-term consequences of SUD; youth homelessness, housing instability, and unmet basic needs such as food and transportation; and the promotion of healthier

community practices that support mental health, safety, and overall well-being. These efforts increased community understanding of issues and built support for PSE goals.

Youth developed a comprehensive analysis of laws pertaining to the legalization of marijuana and hemp and their community impact. Students launched a social media campaign, designed peer education presentations, and delivered 10 sessions to approximately 300 peers over three years.

– Innovation Track funded partner staff member

The legalization of marijuana and THC products in stores affects our community. I mapped how close these stores are to schools and in my research explained why that's harmful, since it makes it easier for kids to access and want these products. I also raised awareness by creating presentations about my research and sharing them in schools.

– Innovation Track youth participant

Youth involvement in **adoption, implementation, and monitoring**

Youth participants engaged and educated key decision-makers, including mayors, city council members, school officials, and state representatives. They wrote letters, made calls, scheduled meetings, and, in some cases, traveled to the California State Capitol to educate legislators during legislative sessions. Their advocacy focused on promoting equitable policies, expanding opportunities for BIPOC youth, and reducing community-level substance use.

Advocating to school boards, we urged for wellness centers in schools along with other reforms such as mandated teacher training to know how to handle situations in which a student may be struggling with mental health.

– Innovation Track youth participant

Youth engaged in policy research and collaborated with community organizations advocating for cannabis equity programs. Participants contributed to recommendations urging city and county officials to reinvest cannabis tax revenues into impacted communities. Several youth leaders presented their findings and personal testimonies at public forums, highlighting the need for economic reinvestment and restorative justice measures in cannabis legislation.

– Innovation Track funded partner staff member

Community-Level Outcomes Across PSE Goals

By the end of the funding cycle, all 69 Standard and Innovation Track funded partners reported meaningful progress toward community-level change across PSE domains.

Policy

Funded partners influenced local-, district-, and state-level policy, with a focus on shifting away from punitive approaches and toward prevention, harm reduction, and equity-driven strategies. In total, partners reported 13 policy changes that included strengthened substance use prevention education, expanded harm reduction practices in schools and public spaces, and increased youth oversight and leadership. These policy changes aimed to address longstanding inequities by ensuring that communities most impacted by substance use and punitive systems had greater access to supportive services and resources.

We achieved extraordinary legislative milestones, solidifying our commitment to ending systemic discrimination against communities directly impacted by the war on drugs. Youth leaders' advocacy and creative campaigns drove our progress toward systemic change. The culmination of these efforts was the passage of a transformative legislative victory that delivered on the promise to address the harms perpetuated by punitive policies by replacing zero-tolerance school substance use policies with harm reduction approaches that prioritize behavioral health supports over punitive measures.

– Innovation Track funded partner staff member

Systems

EYC programs strengthened systems that shape how services are delivered and accessed. Funded partners reported 11 systems-level changes, including improved coordination across agencies, new referral networks, and the creation of resource hubs for justice-impacted youth. Many partners focused on embedding culturally responsive practices within school systems, county offices, and community-based organizations, ensuring that curricula, services, and organizational practices reflected the lived experiences of the youth they serve.

Justice-impacted program participants were trained in participatory defense practices and led informational sessions with peers and families to explain how the resource hub could empower justice-impacted individuals. They collaborated with legal experts and community organizations to develop policy recommendations and ensure the hub's alignment with the needs of system-impacted youth. These efforts culminated in the successful establishment of the Participatory Defense Hub, which now provides resources, mentorship, and advocacy support to youth and families navigating the justice system.

– Standard Track funded partner staff member

Environmental

Funded partners improved both physical and social environments by expanding youth-friendly spaces; implementing harm reduction infrastructure; and launching community awareness campaigns that shifted public perceptions around substance use, equity, and youth well-being. Partners reported eight environmental changes that enhanced safety and accessibility in community spaces, including infrastructure improvements and the introduction of new resources designed to better support youth and families.

Youth conducted garbology studies at a local park near an elementary school, known for gang activity and safety hazards (e.g., needles and other drug paraphernalia). We advocated for a city policy change to adopt harm reduction initiatives within the park. Youth presented to the City Council, and the Council subsequently passed a policy adopting a harm reduction model that included [the] installation of sharps containers. The Council has since requested our youth conduct additional garbology studies at parks throughout the city. Youth remain committed to ongoing research and data collection to further address this issue.

– Innovation Track funded partner staff member

Many community-level outcomes reflected overlapping and reinforcing effects across policy, systems, and environmental domains.²⁸ For example, reforms to school discipline policies were supported by culturally responsive programming (systems) and safer, more supportive youth spaces (environment), creating layered and sustainable impact. Together, these integrated PSE changes reduced structural barriers to access; expanded prevention and support services; and fostered safer, culturally responsive environments that promote long-term community wellness and substance use prevention.

Insights and Implications

In this final chapter, the evaluation team summarizes key successes and challenges in achieving outcomes at the youth, funded partner, and community levels. The evaluation team also discusses the implications of these findings for youth-focused SUD prevention efforts and offers recommendations to support the sustainability of youth, funded partner, and community outcomes.

Success Factors and Challenges

Findings from funded partner focus groups and cumulative reports highlight key successes and challenges in working toward positive outcomes for youth, funded partner organizations, and communities (table 7).

Table 7. Funded partners identified successes and challenges to achieving expected outcomes

Level of outcome	Factors that lead to success	Barriers and challenges
Youth participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporation of youth feedback into project design • Culturally relevant and trauma-informed activities • Family and caregiver involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation barriers • Youth balancing school, work, and family obligations • Financial hardship • Instability among systems-involved youth^a • Safety concerns^b
Funded partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong partnerships with local organizations and schools • Use of flexible EYC funding for youth stipends and new programming • Technical assistance and convenings offered by The Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High staff turnover and burnout • Limited staff capacity for data collection and analysis for evaluation of program impact

Level of outcome	Factors that lead to success	Barriers and challenges
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth leadership in advocacy campaigns Youth engagement in PSE change Policy training through EYC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining continuous youth engagement (see youth participant barriers and challenges above) Time-intensive healing and trust building with youth may not align with limited funding periods

a. Cumulative reports submitted by funded partners that noted “instability” among systems-involved youth did not provide further detail on what “instability” entailed.

b. Safety concerns emerged, particularly for undocumented youth who may face heightened risks when traveling to and from program activities, such as fear of facing immigration enforcement.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of EYC Round 3 cumulative reports submitted to The Center (spring 2025) and funded partner focus groups and listening sessions (fall 2024).

Outcomes were supported by meaningful engagement between youth and funded partner staff members, culturally responsive programming, strong program partnerships, and access to technical assistance and flexible funding. To address program implementation challenges, partners reported strategies such as offering flexible scheduling, increasing outreach to families and schools to better align schedules, providing stipends, and arranging personal transportation support.

Bright Spots

Bright spots showcase the progress made by Round 3 funded partners as well as the promising program practices identified by funded partner staff members and youth participants that promote positive outcomes.

Evaluation findings demonstrate positive results for both youth and funded partners in priority communities

Youth survey results indicate strong overall outcomes for participants in EYC programs, such as high levels of skills and knowledge in healthy behaviors related to SUD prevention and positive mentorship between youth participants and funded partner staff members.

While there were some differences by funding tracks, outcomes were generally positive, suggesting that EYC investments contributed to positive outcomes for communities most impacted by the war on drugs. In addition, many funded partners reported that EYC funding

helped increase their organizational capacity related to staffing, data, partnerships, and the ability to secure funding from multiple sources. Collectively, these findings underscore EYC's meaningful influence on not only youth development but also the capacity of youth-serving organizations.

The EYC program drives meaningful change at multiple levels by offering comprehensive technical assistance and capacity-building support to funded partners

Support provided by EYC included tailored guidance on how to authentically incorporate youth voice into organizational decision-making processes, as well as how to implement effective program evaluation strategies that reflect youth experiences and needs. By strengthening these core practices, the EYC program helps ensure that youth-serving organizations are more responsive, inclusive, and impactful in their work.

The EYC program supports activities that center youth engagement, including youth convenings, listening sessions, and other interactive forums

These activities provide young people a platform to voice their experiences, share insights, and influence the direction of programs and services intended for their benefit. Through structured engagements, youth not only help identify areas for improvement but also play a direct role in shaping more relevant and effective programming. These activities foster a culture of continuous learning among funded partners by encouraging reflection, adaptation, and the integration of youth feedback into ongoing practice. By combining youth-centered activities with intentional partner learning and development, EYC significantly enhances program quality, responsiveness, and sustainability.

Most funded partners achieved meaningful progress toward PSE change by the end of the Round 3 funding cycle

Many funded partners moved beyond early planning and were actively engaged in later phases of PSE change: awareness building in their communities, adoption, and implementation. Some even reported monitoring and evaluating their implemented changes. Youth played a central role in these efforts, supporting community campaigns, coordinating with stakeholders, and helping shape policies and practices. This progress demonstrates how funded partners can translate planning and youth-led engagement into tangible improvements in community environments and systems.

Future Considerations

The evaluation findings demonstrate that the EYC program is producing meaningful outcomes for youth and organizations working in communities disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs. To build on this progress, continued investment and intentional improvements are essential.

Below the evaluation team provides key recommendations for The Center and DHCS, along with rationale and suggestions for future directions. Additionally, the evaluation team offers recommendations to support funded partners in strengthening and sustaining their services for youth.

Continue and expand investment in youth programming

The evaluation team found that EYC funded partners across all funding tracks successfully achieved or made strong progress toward youth outcomes, including SUD prevention skills, mentorship, leadership, and civic engagement. These outcomes are especially important for youth of color and 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth who face systemic inequities and underinvestment.

To maintain this momentum, The Center and DHCS may consider technical assistance to sustain and expand support for youth-serving programs, with an emphasis on multiple multiyear funding sources to promote program stability and long-term planning. In addition to investing in the core strategies, equipping organizations to invest in wraparound supports—such as behavioral health resources, transportation, and referrals for essential resources—can help remove barriers to participation and deepen impact.

Broaden access to capacity-building resources

Capacity Building Track funded partners made notable strides in building their internal capacity. This is a critical foundation for sustaining high-quality programming and community-level outcomes, especially for smaller, culturally specific, or grassroots organizations.

To build on these gains, DHCS may consider embedding capacity-building support in all future funding rounds and funding tracks. Investing in data systems, staffing, technology, and internal infrastructure may continue to stabilize SUD prevention services offered by funded partners. This approach also promotes greater equity by recognizing and addressing the diverse organizational needs of youth-focused substance use prevention program providers.

Across all funded partners, one outcome achieved less consistently was acquiring diversified funding to sustain programming beyond the grant period. To address this in future rounds, DHCS and The Center could provide additional funding to hire tailored

technical support, offer professional development opportunities for staff, and strengthen regional support networks. Partners could also receive guidance on grant writing, fundraising strategies, building partnerships with local stakeholders, and identifying alternative revenue streams. These efforts would help partners develop the financial and organizational capacity to sustain youth-focused prevention programming; translate organizational gains into long-term community impact; and advance policy, systems, and environmental changes in an equitable way that reflects the diverse needs of organizations across regions and populations.

Deepen support for systems-level changes

While some Standard and Innovation Track funded partners demonstrated strong readiness and capacity to pursue community-level outcomes, others faced challenges in distinguishing between program goals and PSE goals. In some cases, partners used program-focused objectives, such as engaging youth in core programming, as stand-ins for PSE goals.

EYC already offers valuable support, such as technical assistance and office hours, to help funded partners advance PSE change. The Center and DHCS could build on these efforts by providing more tailored, individualized assistance to deepen impact and align goals with broader community-level outcomes. This could include coaching to ensure that PSE goals are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) and aligned with the initiative's mission. Additionally, creating opportunities for funded partners to share their progress, such as through peer learning during convenings or by highlighting strong examples of youth-developed policy goals and successful partnerships, can foster collaboration and learning across the network of funded partners. Finally, The Center and DHCS could expand technical assistance to support youth engagement in systems-level change beyond the initial identification of PSE goals. Since meaningful youth involvement is a core outcome of EYC, funded partners would benefit from guidance on strategies that empower young people to actively participate in planning, implementing, and advocating for PSE changes, helping ensure that youth drive tangible, lasting impact in their communities.

Provide specialized support for organizations serving unique populations

Organizations working with highly marginalized or specialized populations, such as undocumented youth and youth involved in the juvenile justice system, often require distinct approaches, resources, and systems of support, as funded partners shared during focus groups. These organizations frequently face increased administrative burdens and must navigate complex social and legal contexts.

There is an opportunity for DHCS and The Center to provide specialized technical assistance, flexible funding structures, and capacity-building support that reflect the unique realities of

serving specialized populations. While EYC already offers many of these resources, they could be tailored to address the distinct challenges faced by funded partners that work with specific populations rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. This might include culturally specific behavioral health resources for funded partner staff and youth and cross-sector partnerships that address overlapping needs. By providing specialized support, EYC can ensure that the most vulnerable youth are not only reached but also meaningfully supported in ways that promote healing, growth, and leadership.

Strengthen engagement and outcomes for transitional-aged youth and boys and young men of color

Evaluation findings indicate that while EYC programs are achieving strong outcomes overall, there is an opportunity to strengthen engagement and impact for transitional-aged youth and BIPOC boys and young men. These populations face systemic inequities that create barriers to trust, sustained participation, and access to supportive services.

To respond to these needs, The Center and DHCS may consider focused investments and technical assistance that support culturally responsive, gender-affirming approaches, including mentorship models centered on mentors of color and shared lived experiences, flexible and career-connected pathways for transitional-aged youth, and trauma-informed SUD prevention and healing-centered supports. These strategies can deepen EYC's equity impact for youth most affected by the war on drugs.

Support funded partners to leverage promising practices for youth engagement and organizational capacity

Building on the promising practices and successes identified in this evaluation, the evaluation team proposes several recommendations to support funded partners in strengthening program implementation and advancing positive youth outcomes. Funded partners should create culturally responsive, welcoming spaces that reflect the identities and lived experiences of youth and make substance use prevention education relevant to youth. Additionally, investing in meaningful leadership opportunities for youth—such as roles in co-creation, advocacy, and peer-led activities—can deepen engagement and improve outcomes. Finally, supporting staff retention through professional development, competitive pay, and leadership pathways is critical to sustaining high-quality programming.

EYC Evaluation Next Steps

The multiyear evaluation of the statewide EYC program will continue through 2027, expanding on current findings to assess the implementation and outcomes of EYC Round 4 funded partners. The insights gained from this evaluation will help identify best practices, highlight challenges, and offer recommendations for enhancing and sustaining future EYC initiatives.

Appendix A. Elevate Youth California Logic Model

The Elevate Youth California Logic Model can also be found here: https://elevateyouthca.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/EYC_Logic_Model_2024_508c_ADA_updated-1.pdf



Elevate Youth California Logic Model

Elevate Youth California (EYC) is a statewide program addressing substance use disorder by investing in the leadership development and civic engagement of youth of color and 2S/LGBTQ+ youth ages 12 to 26 living in communities disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs.

Logic Model Assumptions

The following assumptions and external factors ground the EYC work and approach.

1.

The war on drugs disproportionately affected Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color and low-income communities

2.

Youth of color and 2S/LGBTQ+ youth across California face persistent challenges due to systematic and systemic underinvestment in their communities

3.

Youth are leaders, decision-makers, and drivers of community change

External Factors. Level of support from decision-makers to implement proposed recommendations for policy, systems, and environmental change; private and public infrastructure to support and sustain the work past the grant cycle.

Elevate Youth California is a program of the California Department of Health Care Services funded through Proposition 64 California Cannabis Tax Fund, Allocation 3, Youth Education, Prevention, Early Intervention, and Treatment Account. The Center at Sierra Health Foundation is contracted to support the implementation of EYC.



Elevate Youth California Logic Model

Inputs

- Department of Health Care Services staff and resources
- The Center staff
- Youth Education Prevention, Early Intervention and Treatment Account (YEPEITA) funding
- Evidence-based, innovative, and community-defined prevention practices
- Cohort-based support model with three tracks (Standard 36 months, Innovation 33 months, and Capacity Building 30 months)

Activities

Social Justice Youth Programming

- Civic engagement related to substance use issues or their root causes
- Leadership development through youth-led community programming
- Mentorship/relationship-building between peers and adults

Substance Use Prevention Education, Services, and Supports

- Substance use prevention and early intervention, outreach, and training
- Providing and/or expanding access to resources, supports, or services that meet youths' individual needs

Outputs

The number of youth ...

- Participating in civic engagement program activities
- Leading cultural or community program activities
- Connected to a formal mentor or supportive relationship within the program
- Participating in substance use prevention and early intervention programmatic activities
- Connected to basic needs or other resources, supports, or services provided by the program or program partners

Outcomes

Short-term

- Increased participation of youth in EYC programming
- Increased knowledge in civic engagement, policymaking process and public officials among youth
- Increased number of youth who perceived themselves as being more empowered and confident
- Increased number of youth who have at least one stable, caring relationship with an adult/older youth mentor or peer
- Increased number of youth who understand that substance use is harmful
- Decreased number of youth who report a favorable attitude toward substance use

Intermediate

- Sustained engagement of youth in EYC programming
- Increased demonstrated ability to present on and engage in justice and equity issues—locally and beyond
- Increased demonstration of personal and collective agency through connection to the community
- Increased agency in determining future pathways
- Increased ability to develop and sustain positive relationships
- Increased healthy behaviors among youth

Long-term impacts

Community- and policy-level

- Sustained community capacity for civic engagement and organizing amongst youth and communities disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs
- Sustained policy support for continuous funding



- Policy, system, and environmental changes to increase protective factors (e.g., safe spaces, resources, support systems, community belonging) or reduce harms and risk associated with substance use
- Reduced substance use disorder and substance use initiation among youth
- Reduced substance use disparities among Black, Indigenous, and youth of color
- Positive shifts in narratives about youth most impacted by the war on drugs



Grassroots-level

- Sustained capacity of grassroots and emerging organizations to implement substance use prevention programs

Participant level

Funded partner level

Community level

- Organizational capacity-building activities by funded partners
- Training and technical assistance that supports the key areas of EYC programming by The Center and subcontractors (e.g., webinar on civic engagement, narrative change)

- Number of staff trainings or resources on relevant topics by funded partners
- Number of training and technical assistance hours partners participated in

- Increased knowledge among staff of funded partners of relevant topics regarding organization capacity and sustainability

- Enhanced finance operations; staff development, retention, and capacity; youth voice programming; and data skills among funded partner staff
- Increased amount of EYC partners receiving funding from a variety of sources

- Develop, enhance and/or expand key partnerships that contribute to EYC's collective goals and objectives

- Number of new organizational partnerships that contribute towards the collective goals of EYC and promote narrative change

- Increased awareness of substance use issues and youth-led solutions among organizations, decision-makers, or community members
- Increased level of collaboration among partners to address substance use, its root causes, and harmful narratives

- Increased number of organizations, decision-makers or community members who seek to address substance use, its root causes, and harmful narratives

Definitions. Assumptions – Beliefs, groundings, and contextual factors on which the work is premised; **External Factors** – Contextual factors that could influence the program; **Inputs** – investments into the program; **Activities** – Actions undertaken by funded partners; **Outputs** – Direct products/results of activities; **Short-term outcomes** – Changes expected to occur in a 1-year timeframe, including change in knowledge or attitudes; **Intermediate outcomes** – Changes expected to occur in a 2- to 3-year timeframe, including change in skills or behavior; **Long-term impact** – Results expected after the conclusion of project funding.



Elevate Youth California Logic Model | Examples of Funded Partner Activities

As part of the Elevate Youth California model, funded partners implement a variety of activities that incorporate social justice youth programming and include education, services, and supports. Specifically, funded partners: 1) implement culturally responsive activities grounded in harm reduction trauma-informed care, 2) have competencies and/or receive training and technical assistance to support building relevant competencies around key areas of EYC programming, and 3) use listening sessions to modify the program based on youth experiences. Examples of program activities undertaken by Elevate Youth California funded partners in both social justice youth programming and education, services, and supports follow below.

Social Justice Youth Programming

- **Civic engagement** related to substance use issues or their root causes such as: *participation in local youth advisory boards or coalitions; engagement and substance use prevention education of public officials.*
- **Leadership development** through youth-led community programming such as: *public speaking, developing multi-media campaigns for community action, or training sessions.*
- **Mentorship/relationship-building between peers and adults** that support *establishing at least one stable, caring relationship with an adult/older youth mentor; cultural peers engaging with youth to foster an environment of inclusiveness and belonging.*



Substance Use Prevention Education, Services and Supports

- **Substance use prevention and early intervention outreach, education, and training activities**, such as *substance use prevention education campaigns or programs, outreach, alcohol and drug free social and recreational events.*
- **Providing and/or expanding access to resources, supports, or services that meet youths' individual needs**, such as *providing comprehensive support with resources and referrals for wraparound services (e.g., health care, housing, food, transportation, behavioral health services, education, job training) to help youth meet their basic needs.*

Appendix B. Evaluation Questions

Table B-1. Alignment of EYC evaluation questions, subquestions, and data sources with EYC logic model

Logic model	Evaluation question	Evaluation subquestions	Data sources
Program implementation: Organizational activities and outputs	1. To what extent has EYC been implemented as intended? How has it been adapted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How does the implementation of the EYC program vary across funded partners (including variables such as funding track, types of organizations, and components of the intervention or program, including supports provided to the youth)? b. Who is the EYC program reaching and serving? Are there any intended groups not being reached/served? Are there intended groups being reached who do not enroll in programming? Are there groups that were not intended, but were reached? If so, what were the reasons? c. What were the facilitators and challenges to implementation? d. What were the innovative/effective implementation approaches/components, if any? 	<p>Cumulative report review and pre-aggregated data from biannual reports</p> <p>Funded partner focus groups and listening sessions</p>

Logic model	Evaluation question	Evaluation subquestions	Data sources
Program implementation: Youth and staff activities and outputs	2. What are the differences in experience with the EYC program among groups?	<p>a. What is the overall experience of youth participating in EYC programming? Are there differences in experience among groups of youth?</p> <p>b. What is the overall experience of the funded partners' staff engaging the youth? Are there differences in experience among organizations?</p>	<p>Funded partner focus groups</p> <p>Youth photovoice focus groups</p> <p>Youth survey</p>
Youth outcomes: Short-term, intermediate, and long-term impacts	3. To what extent did the EYC program meet its intended outcomes for program participants?	<p>a. To what extent did the EYC program contribute to changes in the social determinants of health in program participants?</p> <p>b. What were the unintended benefits/ consequences of participating in the EYC program, if any?</p>	<p>Cumulative reports review</p> <p>Funded partner focus groups</p> <p>Youth survey</p> <p>Youth photovoice focus groups</p>
Funded partner outcomes: Short-term, intermediate, and long-term impacts	4. To what extent did the EYC program meet its intended outcomes related to building organizational capacity for organizations?	<p>a. What organizational policies and/or practices (e.g., staff training, staff hiring), if any, were implemented and continued by the funded partners to ensure the practices were culturally responsive, healing-centered, and trauma-informed?</p> <p>b. What proportion of funded partners were able to secure new funding by the end of the EYC grant cycle? And what were partner expectations for the future sustainability of EYC programming?</p>	<p>Cumulative reports review</p> <p>Funded partner focus groups</p>

Logic model	Evaluation question	Evaluation subquestions	Data sources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. What factors facilitated the changes in the organization that led to the intended outcomes? 	
Community outcomes: Long-terms impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. What changes to prevent SUD have occurred in the policy landscape since EYC was implemented, if any? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent did the EYC program contribute to policy, systems, and environmental change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cumulative reports review Funded partner focus groups Youth survey

Source: Elevate Youth California evaluation plan (November 2023).

Appendix C. Data Sources

This report's key findings are based on triangulated data from both qualitative and quantitative sources, including organizational staff, reports, and youth participants. Additionally, the evaluation team collaborated with a think tank, composed of funded partner staff members, to guide evaluation activities and co-develop findings. The following section outlines the methods used for this evaluation.

Review of Cumulative Reports and Aggregated Demographic Data

Funded partners submitted to The Center a cumulative report at the end of their grant period to report on programmatic activities, policy goals and progress toward achieving them, capacity-building goals and progress toward achieving them, culturally responsive practices, lessons learned, and outcomes at the community levels. In February 2025, the evaluation team analyzed data from cumulative reports of all 103 funded partners.

Funded partners also submitted progress reports to The Center, detailing youth served, partnerships, and core programming. In February 2025, the evaluation team analyzed the aggregated demographic data of youth served shared by The Center.

Youth Survey

During spring 2024, the evaluation team piloted a new survey with youth participants in four EYC programs. As part of the pilot, the evaluation team conducted interviews with survey respondents to gather insights on how to improve the survey process and questions. The refined survey was administered to youth engaged in EYC Round 3 programs from August to November 2024. The online survey inquired about opportunities for young people to engage in civic engagement and social justice activities, the number of supportive adults in their EYC programs, the quality of mentorship, leadership development within EYC programs, and the skills gained in SUD prevention.

A total of 1,534 youth from 94 EYC Round 3 programs participated in the survey, representing 91 percent of the 103 funded partners. Among the survey respondents, 827 (54 percent) participated in Standard Track programs, 252 (16 percent) in Innovation Track programs, and 455 (30 percent) in Capacity Building Track programs.

Additional demographic characteristics of youth survey participants appear in table C-1.

Table C-1. EYC youth survey participant demographic characteristics

Demographic	Category	N (%)
Gender	Man/boy	424 (37%)
Gender	Woman/girl	652 (58%)
Gender	Gender non-conforming or questioning	55 (5%)
Gender	Sub-total	1131 (100%)
Race-ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	110 (8%)
Race-ethnicity	Black or African American	233 (16%)
Race-ethnicity	East Asian or Asian American	99 (7%)
Race-ethnicity	Hispanic or Latina/o/x	583 (40%)
Race-ethnicity	Indigenous to Latin America	50 (3%)
Race-ethnicity	Middle Eastern or North African	19 (1%)
Race-ethnicity	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	16 (1%)
Race-ethnicity	Southeast Asian	72 (5%)
Race-ethnicity	White	139 (10%)
Race-ethnicity	Two or more races and ethnicities	81 (6%)
Race-ethnicity	Another race-ethnicity not listed here	38 (3%)
Race-ethnicity	Sub-total	1440 (100%)
2S/LGBTQIA+	No	880 (82%)
2S/LGBTQIA+	Yes	189 (18%)
2S/LGBTQIA+	Sub-total	1069 (100%)
Systems engaged	No	1000 (87%)
Systems engaged	Yes	145 (13%)
Systems engaged	Sub-total	1145 (100%)
Time in program	0–8 months	534 (35%)
Time in program	9 months to 1 year	275 (18%)

Demographic	Category	N (%)
Time in program	1 year to 2 years	313 (20%)
Time in program	2 years to 3 years	203 (13%)
Time in program	3 or more years	209 (14%)
Time in program	Sub-total	1534 (100%)
Age	12–13 years old	181 (12%)
Age	14–17 years old	768 (50%)
Age	18–22 years old	420 (27%)
Age	23–26 years old	165 (11%)
Age	Sub-total	1534 (100%)
Track	Standard Track	827 (54%)
Track	Innovation Track	252 (16%)
Track	Capacity Building Track	455 (30%)
Track	Sub-total	1534 (100%)

Note: N = Number of participants per group. Values are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may not equal 100 percent. Systems-engaged refer to youth who reported ever being part of the justice or foster care systems.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of the EYC Youth Survey 2024.

Youth Photovoice Focus Groups

In October and November 2024, young people from EYC Round 3 programs were invited to participate in virtual photovoice focus groups. An informational webinar was held to inform funded partners about the process for inviting young people to focus group sessions. Youth received informational materials to prepare them to participate, including a video about the focus group process and photo guidelines. Youth were asked to submit pictures to be shared and discussed during focus group sessions. The photo prompts included questions such as, “How has your EYC program prepared you to be a leader, changed your view on drug and alcohol use, helped you connect with your peers?” and “When you think about your time in your program, what makes you feel proud?” The evaluation team engaged 34 youth participants in photovoice focus groups, with 15 (44 percent) in Standard Track programs, 7 (21 percent) in Innovation Track programs, and 12 (35 percent) in Capacity

Building Track programs. Participants were offered a \$25 gift card for their time and insights.

Funded Partner Focus Groups

In September and October 2024, selected EYC funded partner staff members were invited to participate in 90-minute virtual focus groups. The sessions focused on partner experiences with implementing EYC-funded activities, intended participant outcomes, lessons learned, innovative strategies, and recommendations. The Center identified programs based on track and engagement. Five focus group sessions were conducted with 23 staff members from 21 funded programs.

Funded Partner Listening Sessions

In December 2024, two listening sessions were conducted among the 11 Innovation Track funded partners to learn about innovative strategies to address substance use prevention as well as facilitators and challenges to implementation. Additionally, funded partner staff members were asked about effective strategies to enhance program outcomes among youth participants.

Engagement with Think Tank

The evaluation team engaged the EYC Evaluation Think Tank, consisting of six staff members from funded partners, to review data collection materials and co-interpret results from data collected. During the second year of the evaluation, three sessions were held on the development and refinement of the youth survey, funded partner focus group protocol, and youth photovoice focus group process and protocol. Participants were offered a \$1,000 incentive for attending all three sessions, supporting their full commitment in the review and interpretation process.

Limitations of Data Sources

While the evaluation draws on multiple data sources, there are several limitations to consider when interpreting findings and drawing conclusions. The youth survey responses may be influenced by self-selection bias, as participation was voluntary and may not fully represent the perspectives of all youth involved in the programs. Youth photovoice focus groups, while rich in qualitative insights, are limited by the number of participants and may reflect the experiences of more engaged or vocal youth. Similarly, staff focus groups provide valuable context but may be influenced by organizational priorities or staff roles,

potentially limiting the range of perspectives. Finally, funded partner reports vary in depth and consistency, as each organization may have interpreted reporting guidelines differently or had differing capacities for data collection and reflection.

Appendix D. EYC Round 3 Youth Participants and Core Programming

Table D-1. Demographic characteristics for all new program participants by funding track

Demographic	Category	Standard Track	Innovation Track	Capacity Building Track	Total
Gender	Female	12838 (55%)	3189 (50%)	3803 (49%)	19830
Gender	Transgender woman/girl	41 (0%)	27 (0%)	75 (1%)	143
Gender	Male	9858 (42%)	2929 (46%)	3478 (45%)	16265
Gender	Transgender man/boy	93 (0%)	16 (0%)	58 (1%)	167
Gender	Non-binary/gender non-conforming	642 (3%)	173 (3%)	309 (4%)	1124
Gender	Sub-total	23472 (100%)	6334 (100%)	7723 (100%)	37529
2S/LGBTQIA+	Yes*	1799 (6%)	403 (4%)	1022 (11%)	3224
Race-ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	535 (2%)	2989 (47%)	337 (4%)	3861
Race-ethnicity	Asian	2722 (12%)	353 (6%)	971 (12%)	4046
Race-ethnicity	Black or African American	4868 (21%)	418 (7%)	3015 (36%)	8301
Race-ethnicity	Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin	10936 (47%)	1879 (30%)	2329 (28%)	15144
Race-ethnicity	Other race-ethnicity	2203 (9%)	302 (5%)	891 (11%)	3396

Demographic	Category	Standard Track	Innovation Track	Capacity Building Track	Total
Race-ethnicity	White	2171 (9%)	377 (6%)	790 (10%)	3338
Race-ethnicity	Sub-total	23435 (100%)	6318 (100%)	8333 (100%)	38086
Age	Youth age 12 to 17	22988 (83%)	5443 (83%)	5314 (68%)	33745
Age	Young adults age 18 to 20	2350 (8%)	547 (8%)	1562 (20%)	4459
Age	Young adults age 21 to 26	2525 (9%)	569 (9%)	995 (13%)	4089
Age	Sub-total	27863 (100%)	6559 (100%)	7871 (100%)	42293
Grand total^a		32101 (63%)	9805 (19%)	9168 (18%)	51074

*This row reflects only youth who self-identified as 2S/LGBTQIA+, with percentages calculated from the grand total number of youth served per funding track as the denominator.

a. Grand total for all new participants.

Note: All table values are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may not equal 100 percent. All percentages less than 0.5% will show as 0%. “Other race-ethnicity” category includes Indigenous to Latin America, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, and other race/ethnicity not listed. Counts in Tables D-1 and D-2 may not align across categories because funded partners reported aggregate demographic data separately for youth who enrolled in programming and youth who completed programming. As a result, the demographic totals for program completers may exceed totals reported for new participants in some demographic categories. These differences reflect variations in funded partner reporting practices and data availability rather than confirmed discrepancies in participation.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of aggregated funded partner reports (spring 2025).

Table D-2. Demographic characteristics for all youth who successfully completed their program by funding track

Demographic	Category	Standard Track	Innovation Track	Capacity Building Track	Total
Gender	Female	9531 (55%)	2426 (51%)	2881 (53%)	14838
Gender	Transgender woman/girl	72 (0%)	52 (1%)	52 (1%)	176
Gender	Male	7079 (41%)	2116 (44%)	2257 (42%)	11452
Gender	Transgender man/boy	108 (1%)	27 (1%)	54 (1%)	189
Gender	Non-binary/gender non-conforming	473 (3%)	166 (3%)	156 (3%)	795
Gender	Sub-total	17263 (100%)	4787 (100%)	5400 (100%)	27450
2S/LGBTQIA+	Yes*	1479 (6%)	471 (6%)	513 (8%)	2463
Race-ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	373 (2%)	2493 (46%)	308 (6%)	3174
Race-ethnicity	Asian	2203 (12%)	262 (5%)	593 (11%)	3058
Race-ethnicity	Black or African American	2429 (14%)	463 (9%)	2084 (38%)	4976
Race-ethnicity	Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin	10004 (56%)	1363 (25%)	1437 (26%)	12804
Race-ethnicity	Other race-ethnicity	1246 (7%)	588 (11%)	654 (12%)	2488
Race-ethnicity	White	1694 (9%)	252 (5%)	466 (8%)	2412
Race-ethnicity	Sub-total	17949 (100%)	5421 (100%)	5542 (100%)	28912
Age	Youth age 12 to 17	17351 (86%)	3567 (78%)	3453 (63%)	24371

Demographic	Category	Standard Track	Innovation Track	Capacity Building Track	Total
Age	Young adults age 18 to 20	1746 (9%)	547 (12%)	1196 (22%)	3489
Age	Young adults age 21 to 26	993 (5%)	484 (10%)	818 (15%)	2295
Age	Sub-total	20090 (100%)	4598 (100%)	5467 (100%)	30155
Grand total^a		23941 (62%)	8119 (21%)	6393 (17%)	38453

*This row reflects only youth who self-identified as 2S/LGBTQIA+, with percentages calculated from the grand total number of youth served per funding track as the denominator.

a. Grand total for all youth who successfully completed their program.

Note: All table values are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may not equal 100 percent. All percentages less than 0.5% will show as 0%. “Other race-ethnicity” category includes Indigenous to Latin America, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, White, and other race/ethnicity not listed. Counts in Tables D-1 and D-2 may not align across categories because funded partners reported aggregate demographic data separately for youth who enrolled in programming and youth who completed programming. As a result, the demographic totals for program completers may exceed totals reported for new participants in some demographic categories. These differences reflect variations in funded partner reporting practices and data availability rather than confirmed discrepancies in participation.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of aggregated funded partner reports (spring 2025).

Table D-3. Core program characteristics by funding track

Funding track	Required strategy	Number and percentage of funded partners providing required strategies	Minimum program length	Median program length	Maximum program length
Standard Track	Youth civic engagement/leadership opportunities for PSE change and mentorship/relationship-building and/or peer-led support/peer-led programming	58 (100%)	Less than eight weeks	Six months to one year	More than two years
Innovation Track	Youth civic engagement/leadership opportunities for PSE change and mentorship/relationship-building and/or peer-led support/peer-led programming	11 (100%)	Less than eight weeks	Six months to one year	More than two years
Capacity Building Track	Peer-led support/peer-led programming and/or mentorship/relationship-building	34 (100%)	Less than eight weeks	Six months to one year	More than two years

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of aggregated funded partner reports (spring 2025).

Appendix E. Youth Survey Results

Table E-1. EYC youth survey results for substance use prevention knowledge and skills

Survey question	Group	Agree/ strongly agree	Disagree/ strongly disagree	Total
I know how to remove myself from situations where people around me are misusing substances like drugs and alcohol.	Standard Track	621 (94%)	40 (6%)	661
	Innovation Track	186 (91%)	18 (9%)	204
	Capacity Building Track	321 (90%)	34 (10%)	355
	Total	1128 (92%)	92 (8%)	1220
I have learned about the negative impacts of misusing drugs and alcohol on communities like my own.	Standard Track	634 (96%)	26 (4%)	660
	Innovation Track	192 (94%)	12 (6%)	204
	Capacity Building Track	328 (93%)	25 (7%)	353
	Total	1154 (95%)	63 (5%)	1217
I know where to go to for support and information about substance use.	Standard Track	**	**	**
	Innovation Track	**	*	**
	Capacity Building Track	**	**	**
	Total	1171 (96%)	50 (4%)	1221

Survey question	Group	Agree/ strongly agree	Disagree/ strongly disagree	Total
I know how to turn down a friend who may offer me substances like drugs or alcohol.	Standard Track	627 (95%)	34 (5%)	661
	Innovation Track	191 (94%)	13 (6%)	204
	Capacity Building Track	331 (93%)	24 (7%)	355
	Total	1149 (94%)	71 (6%)	1220

* Represents counts that are less than 11 which are not shown in accordance with the CalHHS DDG Edition 2.0.

** Represents counts for complementary data that are not shown in accordance with the CalHHS DDG Edition 2.0.

Note: Values are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may not equal 100 percent. Data represent participants who responded “agree/strongly agree” and “disagree/strongly disagree” to the question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself? As a result of my participation in my EYC program ...” Participants who did not respond to the question or answered “Prefer not to say” were not included in these results.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of EYC Youth Survey 2024.

Table E-2. EYC youth survey results for youth-adult mentorship/relationship-building and support from program staff

Survey question	Group	Often/ sometimes	Rarely/ never	Total
I talked to this person about how to solve problems.	Standard Track	566 (80%)	140 (20%)	706
	Innovation Track	151 (71%)	63 (29%)	214
	Capacity Building Track	269 (75%)	92 (25%)	361
	Total	986 (77%)	295 (23%)	1281
This person helped me set and reach goals.	Standard Track	615 (88%)	84 (12%)	699
	Innovation Track	176 (83%)	37 (17%)	213
	Capacity Building Track	306 (86%)	49 (14%)	355
	Total	1097 (87%)	170 (13%)	1267
I felt comfortable sharing my thoughts and feelings with this person.	Standard Track	642 (91%)	60 (9%)	702
	Innovation Track	179 (84%)	35 (16%)	214
	Capacity Building Track	316 (88%)	45 (12%)	361
	Total	1137 (89%)	140 (11%)	1277

Note: Values are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may not equal 100 percent. Data represent participants who responded “often/sometimes” and “rarely/never” to the question “Within the last year, how frequently did the following happen with the one person older than you that you can go to for support at your EYC program?” Participants who did not respond to the question or answered “Prefer not to say” were not included in these results.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of EYC Youth Survey 2024.

Table E-3. EYC youth survey results for leadership development

Survey question	Group	Often/ sometimes	Rarely/ never	Total
I led an activity such as a discussion group, service project, or event.	Standard Track	506 (68%)	242 (32%)	748
	Innovation Track	131 (58%)	95 (42%)	226
	Capacity Building Track	251 (60%)	164 (40%)	415
	Total	888 (64%)	501 (36%)	1389
I helped plan a program activity or event.	Standard Track	493 (66%)	253 (34%)	746
	Innovation Track	120 (53%)	106 (47%)	226
	Capacity Building Track	224 (54%)	190 (46%)	414
	Total	837 (60%)	549 (40%)	1386
I've been asked by staff or other participants for my ideas about the program or an activity.	Standard Track	601 (80%)	146 (20%)	747
	Innovation Track	149 (67%)	75 (33%)	224
	Capacity Building Track	305 (73%)	110 (27%)	415
	Total	1055 (76%)	331 (24%)	1386
I participated in a discussion without being prompted.	Standard Track	589 (79%)	154 (21%)	743
	Innovation Track	145 (64%)	81 (36%)	226
	Capacity Building Track	298 (72%)	115 (28%)	413
	Total	1032 (75%)	350 (25%)	1382

Survey question	Group	Often/ sometimes	Rarely/ never	Total
I contributed solutions for a community problem.	Standard Track	544 (73%)	204 (27%)	748
	Innovation Track	139 (62%)	85 (38%)	224
	Capacity Building Track	286 (69%)	129 (31%)	415
	Total	969 (70%)	418 (30%)	1387

Note: Values are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may not equal 100 percent. Data represent participants who responded “often/sometimes” and “rarely/never” to the question “How frequently did the following happened at your EYC program within the last year?” Participants who did not respond to the question or answered “Prefer not to say” were not included in these results.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of EYC Youth Survey 2024.

Table E-4. EYC youth survey results for opportunities for civic and social justice engagement for youth in Standard and Innovation Track programs

Survey question	Group	Yes	No	Total
Be involved in political or social activities that promoted equality and/or justice.^a	Standard Track	522 (78%)	148 (22%)	670
	Innovation Track	151 (73%)	55 (27%)	206
	Total	673 (77%)	203 (23%)	876
Researched or learned more about a social justice issue affecting my community.	Standard Track	527 (79%)	142 (21%)	669
	Innovation Track	142 (70%)	62 (30%)	204
	Total	669 (77%)	204 (23%)	873
Discussed issues of equality or justice.	Standard Track	537 (80%)	131 (20%)	668
	Innovation Track	152 (75%)	50 (25%)	202
	Total	689 (79%)	181 (21%)	870
Attended a meeting in which there was a discussion of issues affecting my community.	Standard Track	480 (72%)	185 (28%)	665
	Innovation Track	108 (53%)	97 (47%)	205
	Total	588 (68%)	282 (32%)	870
Contacted someone in government who represents my community.	Standard Track	296 (44%)	378 (56%)	674
	Innovation Track	72 (35%)	132 (65%)	204
	Total	368 (42%)	510 (58%)	878

Survey question	Group	Yes	No	Total
Made posts or discussed issues of equality or justice on social media.	Standard Track	331 (49%)	341 (51%)	672
	Innovation Track	75 (37%)	129 (63%)	204
	Total	406 (46%)	470 (54%)	876
Provided testimony to support a social justice campaign.	Standard Track	267 (40%)	394 (60%)	661
	Innovation Track	76 (37%)	127 (63%)	203
	Total	343 (40%)	521 (60%)	864

a. While the survey measures youth participation in various forms of civic engagement, lobbying activities were not permitted under the EYC program.

Note: Values are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may not equal 100 percent. Data represent participants who responded “yes” and “no” to the question “Did you have the opportunity to do the following activities at your EYC program?” Participants who did not respond to the question or answered “Prefer not to say” were not included in these results. Capacity Building Track funded partners were not required to provide youth civic engagement programming and are therefore not included in this analysis.

Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of EYC Youth Survey 2024.

Appendix F. Overview of PSE Goals Identified by Youth

Funded partners were required to involve youth in shaping policy, systems, or environmental (PSE) change goals, most often through listening sessions. Of the 69 Standard and Innovation Track partners, 52 (75 percent) reported at least one youth-driven solution for substance use prevention.

Youth identified diverse goals across four main areas:

- **Community awareness and prevention:** Youth participants designed multilingual campaigns via social media, videos, podcasts, and other creative media to shift narratives around addiction and promote prevention.

Example: Reduce community-level substance use solicitation (advertising and access) to youth in Oakland [communities] that were targeted by the war on drugs by 10 percent through creating transparent war on drugs and youth-led anti-substance use media.

- **Addressing criminalization:** Youth participants proposed revisions to school discipline policies to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and called for reforms in immigration and policing practices to rebuild trust and reduce harm.

Example: Improve the school experience for males of color, including system-involved youth, by addressing high suspension rates and the lack of culturally appropriate mental health and substance use resources. Address all school boards throughout Sacramento County in adopting new policies that focus on behavioral health in priority populations.

- **Expanding culturally responsive resources:** Youth participants advocated for mental health services rooted in cultural understanding; adoption of culturally relevant curricula; and opportunities for skill building, academic success, and career preparation.

Example: Latino youth will implement an environmental change campaign to increase access to culturally competent mental health programming as an alternative to substance use/abuse among youth living in marginalized, low-income communities and will raise awareness of the risks to youth of substance use and misuse in Ventura County.

- **Investing public funds in youth leadership:** Youth participants prioritized expanding access to leadership development, civic engagement, and advocacy opportunities that center BIPOC youth experiences and expertise.

Example: Youth participating in our leadership development programs will impact the overall community by increasing the number of trained and employed underrepresented youth and establishing relationships with local and state decision-makers with opportunities to advocate at the legislative level.

Appendix G. Phases of PSE Change

As part of the grant requirements, Standard and Innovation Track funded partners were required to identify and work toward a policy, systems, or environmental (PSE) change related to substance use prevention. PSE changes focus on shifting the conditions that shape behavior, such as policies, institutional practices, or community environments, rather than individual knowledge or skills.

In their required reporting, funded partners described the PSE change they were pursuing, the progress made during the funding period, and the phase of change their work had reached. The framework used to describe these phases was shared with funded partners to support consistent planning and reporting across projects.

Table G-1 outlines the PSE change phases and provides a brief description of each stage.

Table G-1. Policy, systems, and environmental change phases and descriptions

PSE change phase	Description
Issue identification	Partners identify the policy, systems, or environmental change their project will focus on in relation to substance use prevention. This stage often includes youth-led exploration and analysis of issues affecting their communities. For example, organizations may engage young people in youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) to frame problems, ask questions, and gather information. Youth may also help assess feasibility and set priorities to clarify the project’s focus.
Strategy and planning	In this phase, funded partners collaborate with young people to develop an approach and action plan to address the identified issue. Activities may include educational sessions or tools such as power mapping to identify key stakeholders, decision-makers, and available resources.
Coordination/engaging stakeholders	This stage reflects preparation to act and includes building relationships with those most connected to the issue. Youth may begin participating in or leading civic engagement activities, meeting with community members or leaders, or preparing for a campaign launch that communicates the need for PSE change.

PSE change phase	Description
Community campaign/ awareness building	Partners put plans into action by implementing campaigns or initiatives designed to raise awareness and build support. For example, a project aiming to reduce youth suspensions and substance use may support young people to design and lead a schoolwide prevention campaign that promotes restorative justice and highlights the negative impacts of suspension on learning. Activities might include public comments at school board meetings, school rallies, or other community events.
Adoption	PSE change often takes time. Adoption occurs when actions result in the intended policy, systems, or environmental shift. This may include the passage of a new law, issuance of an executive order, or formal integration of a new practice into existing policies or procedures, such as a school adopting harm reduction-focused approaches.
Implementation	This phase focuses on putting the adopted change into practice and sustaining it over time. Activities may include youth-led education and outreach, gathering feedback from young people to assess progress, monitoring implementation, and sharing or celebrating the achievement through strategic communications.
Monitoring	This stage focuses on tracking implementation activities and systematically collecting data to assess progress toward the adopted PSE change. Activities may include monitoring fidelity, documenting reach, and identifying early implementation challenges or successes.
Evaluation	This stage examines the effectiveness of the adopted policy, systems, or environmental change. Evaluation activities assess outcomes and impacts, including changes at the individual, organizational, or community level, as well as shifts in systems, policies, or institutional practices.

Source: Elevate Youth California.

Endnotes

- ¹ The proportion of new program participants who self-identified as youth of color (91%) is based on youth-reported background information collected by funded partners and reported in their biannual reports, which were aggregated by The Center and analyzed by EDNW (N = 38,086; see Table D1 in Appendix D).
- ² The proportion of new program participants who self-identified as 2S/LGBTQIA+ (6%) is based on youth-reported background information collected by funded partners and reported in their biannual reports, which were aggregated by The Center and analyzed by EDNW (N = 3,224; see Table D1 in Appendix D).
- ³ The proportion of new program participants who self-identified their age group as 12-17 (80%) is based on youth-reported background information collected by funded partners and reported in their biannual reports, which were aggregated by The Center and analyzed by EDNW (N = 42,293; see Table D1 in Appendix D).
- ⁴ Percentage ranges are based on the lowest and highest item-level results from the youth survey across all participants (see table E1 for item-level results on youth substance use prevention knowledge and skills; table E2 for youth–adult mentorship/relationship-building and support from program staff; table E3 for youth leadership development; and table E4 for opportunities for youth civic and social justice engagement). Results in tables E1–E3 include youth from all funding tracks, while table E4 includes results for youth in the Standard and Innovation funding tracks.
- ⁵ California Dialogue on Cancer. (2017). Policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change. Approaches to comprehensive cancer control and prevention. https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CDOC/PSE_FactSheet.pdf
- ⁶ The Food Trust. (2012). What is policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change? https://healthtrust.org/Policy_Systems_and_Environmental_Change.pdf
- ⁷ National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2020). *Substance use disorders*. <https://www.nami.org/substance-use-disorders/>
- ⁸ Moore, L. D., & Elkavich, A. (2008). Who's using and who's doing time: Incarceration, the War on drugs, and public health. *American Journal of Public Health, 95*(5), 782–786. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.126284>
- ⁹ Drug Policy Alliance. [Drug Policy Alliance - No More Drug War](#)
- ¹⁰ Ginwright, S., & Cammarota, J. (2002). New terrain in youth development: The promise of a social justice approach. *Social Justice, 29*(4 (90)), 82–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768150>
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- ¹² Porche, M. V., Fortuna, L. R., & Tolou-Shams, M. (2022). Unpacking the layers: Dismantling inequities in substance use services and outcomes for racially minoritized adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 31*(2), 223–236. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2021.11.002>
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- ¹⁵ Prevention Institute. (n.d.). *California's Prop 64 Youth Fund: An opportunity to promote equity and prevent substance use among youth*. <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/publications/YouthFundBriefingPaper.pdf>
- ¹⁶ Since the evaluation began near the conclusion of Round 2, activities and outcomes from Rounds 1 and 2 were not part of this evaluation.
- ¹⁷ Social Policy Research Associates, & Education Northwest. (2023). Progress report 1: Data monitoring memo [Internal memo].
- ¹⁸ Hood, K., Hopson, S., & Kirkhart, R. (2015). Culturally responsive evaluation: Theory, practice, and future. In K. E. Newcomer, H. P. Hatry, & J. S. Wholey (Eds.), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (pp. 281–318). Wiley.
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- ²¹ Throughout their funding cycle, funded partners tracked youth participation and applied their own criteria to define program completion, which can vary across organizations. Generally, youth are considered to have successfully completed the program when they are no longer participating in core programming activities or events. Program completion does not include youth who exit the program because they dropped out/lost contact, were asked to leave, the services were not appropriate for them, or the youth was no longer eligible to participate (e.g., they moved outside of California or aged out). Youth may have already been part of the funded partner's programming prior to EYC funding.
- ²² Not all funded partners provided complete demographic data for youth participants. The findings presented here focus only on participants with known demographic information. Individuals who selected “prefer not to say,” “prefer to self-describe,” or whose data were marked as “unknown” have been excluded from the analyses. The number of participants removed varies by demographic category (e.g., age, gender identity, race-ethnicity), depending on the completeness of the data reported.
- ²³ This figure presents data exclusively on program completers. For comprehensive data on all youth participants, including those who successfully completed their programs, see appendix D.
- ²⁴ Youth in EYC programs may have participated in other forms of civic engagement that are not captured in the survey instrument.
- ²⁵ Capacity Building Track partners were not required to identify or report a PSE goal.
- ²⁶ In cumulative reports, funded partners were asked to describe up to three policy goals from their workplans, indicate the level of the goal (e.g., county, state), note whether the goal was identified by youth participants, and report the phase of achieving the goal (e.g., issue identification, community campaign). Partners were guided to provide qualitative input on PSE change outcomes, which may include “school or district policy changes related to substance use, adoption or implementation of local

or state policies, or state and local budget approvals.” While these items focused on “policy goals”, the evaluation interprets the updates as reporting on PSE goals.

²⁷ Lobbying activities are not an approved activity under EYC. Information may be provided to elected officials and decision-makers, but EYC funds were not used for lobbying.

²⁸ Funded partners were not required to specify the PSE domain of their activities. The categorization of PSE goals presented here is based on the evaluation team’s analysis of the reported policy goals and activities.