

FIERCE

Ford Foundation Report

Grant Period: Year 1: May 1, 2013 – April 30, 2014 Year 2: May 1, 2014 – April 30, 2015

Goal: Outreach and Base Build to Establish a National Network of LGBTQ Youth Organizers

Educating + Recruiting + Engaging = Base Building

The above formula represents FIERCE's local approach to base-building. The elements that drive FIERCE's local base-building efforts are **connection, follow up, and concrete opportunity** to plug into an area of work. As FIERCE transferred this approach to a national scale, it was imperative to get **youth organizers from across the country in the same room to foster both individual connection and cross-organizational connection.**

Through national and regional convening's as well as organizational site visits and learning exchanges, FIERCE has **successfully developed a strong network of LGBTQ Youth Organizers.** Moreover, FIERCE continues to **pioneer youth-led national movement building** that builds **unprecedented politically and culturally relevant LGBTQ youth of color accessible spaces.**

MacArthur Genius Ai-jen Poo while speaking at a Ford Foundation event in November, 2012, said "Begin from the place of greatest invisibility." FIERCE's approach to work from an intersectional framework uplifts LGBTQ youth of color who embody marginalized identities as homeless or formerly homeless, marginally housed, immigrant, undocumented, first generation, low-income and victims and survivors of the foster care system, shelter system and criminal justice system. This means **our work is accountable to fostering leadership and engaging LGBTQ youth most impacted by injustice, deliberate in employing popular education methods for both issue-based and landscape analysis, and strategic for the long haul, both in terms of inclusivity and building a vision from the ground up.** The goal of base-building in relation to campaign organizing is not just to build people power but also to listen to the people experiencing oppression and honor their power to be leaders in transforming the conditions they live under. Listening and engagement is **key to ensuring the issue(s) that bind the base together are deeply and widely felt by people** so as to ensure active engagement and long term commitment to carry out the work of being on the frontlines for social justice.

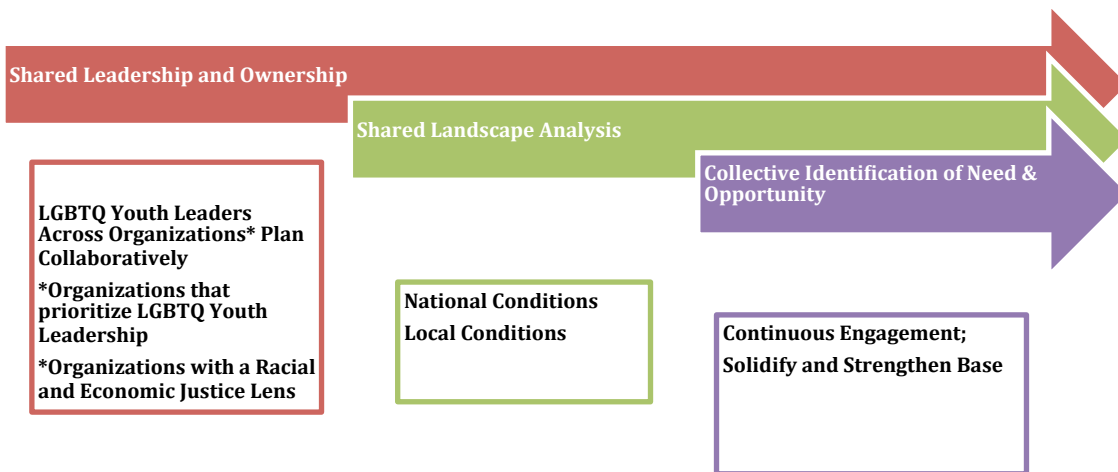
As we intentionally and successfully **integrate youth development as a value and skill into national movement building,** we are **developing grassroots community organizing expertise in a new generation of youth leaders.** From modeling **how to create safe, multi-issue, cross-regional queer and trans youth of color led spaces** to exposing youth leaders to political education they have not had access to about LGBTQ movement history, FIERCE's national work has sparked significant seeds of transformation as LGBTQ youth of color from across the country **see themselves as leaders a part of a broader movement; a movement they are apart of and have agency in shaping while also breaking the isolation of their circumstances to have more access to supportive and affirming peers.**

Youth leadership is about creating opportunities for young people to take risks and learn in a safe environment. This experiential learning approach combined with popular education methods of centralizing and building off of the knowledge in the room is unfortunately infrequent for LGBTQ youth of color to access and thus **makes our work transformative for those directly impacted**

by the injustices we are addressing. Through our national base-building efforts, we have achieved an incredible amount of connection, engagement and cross-organizational learning and solidarity as well as advanced leadership development of FIERCE members and LGBTQ youth organizers across the country.

In addition to organizing 5 national or regional convening’s over the last 2 years, FIERCE has engaged in the following exchanges to further build and strengthen the network of LGBTQ youth organizing groups working from a racial and economic justice framework and lens: 1) GSA network to explore a queer youth of color roundtable and strengthen connections between school-to-prison pipeline work and street-based police accountability work 2) Exchanges with FLY from Chicago, Youth Empowerment Project of New Orleans, and the Attic from Philadelphia to learn more about each other’s work as well as answer specific questions about FIERCE’s youth-led structures and leadership development model.

The goal of our national base-building efforts were to **collectively identify the viability and vision of a more formalized network** of organizations that work with and centralize the leadership of LGBTQ youth of color in their organizing efforts. **The national youth-led base-building model we developed takes into account the complexity of building connection amongst individual youth leaders as well as broader organizational relationship building:**



• **Steps for National Base-Building**

FIERCE’s National Base-Building Model: Shared political analysis and shared leadership in developing the platform for engagement is required for establishing an authentic understanding of both the external conditions that impact and inform our work and internal organizational structures that demonstrate a commitment to sustaining youth leadership locally and nationally

Goal: Build the Skills and Organizing Capacity of LGBTQ Youth Organizers

For over two years, FIERCE has played a critical leadership role in creating **queer and trans youth of color led spaces** for LGBTQ Youth of Color leaders and **organizers across the country** to share skills, strategies and challenges, and build solidarity and collaboration **to strengthen local organizing efforts**.

From our fabulous, creative, youth-driven, radical media-making, media sharing & media strategizing with LGBTQ youth from across the country at FIERCE and Branching Seedz' **Queer & Trans Youth of Color Network Gathering at the Allied Media Conference** to our **National Summit in Chicago** to our **Northeast and Mid-West regional convening's**, FIERCE has created critical **youth-led spaces by and for queer and trans youth of color who are at the frontlines of organizing for social justice in their community**.

In the Fall of 2013, FIERCE hosted a **Northeast Regional Gathering** in New York City. This gathering was FIERCE's first region-based gathering. FIERCE's regional convening's recognize that as LGBTQ youth organizers create a path to LGBTQ youth liberation, **strategies vary according to local context and history**.

From December 10-11, 2013, FIERCE convened nearly 30 LGBTQ youth of color and adult allies from 9 youth programs across the northeast for our *Move Up, Fight Back* Northeast Regional Convening. The groups included the [Attic Youth Center](#), FIERCE, [Global Action Project](#), [Youth Power Project](#) and [GLOBE](#) from [Make the Road NY](#), [Out Now](#), the [PRYSM \(Providence Youth Student Movement\)](#), [SMYAL \(Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders\)](#), and [Streetwise & Safe](#).

At the convening, participants shared their work, built relationships with each another, discussed intersecting issues impacting their local communities and shared strategies to address these issues. FIERCE's national report, *Moving Up, Fighting Back: Creating A Path to LGBTQ Youth Liberation* provided a framework for discussing the landscape of LGBTQ youth issues and organizing. We held a queer and trans walking tour of the historic West Village, discussed resource sharing and generated ways groups could concretely support and forward each other's work. **A key learning from this gathering was the intersections between the work to decriminalize youth in the school system and the work to decriminalize youth outside of the school system**. This connection between organizing for Educational Justice and organizing for safety and liberation of street-based youth and the potential for strengthening each other's work with shared analysis was inspiring.

In November 2013, FIERCE met with Appalshop, an arts and education center in the heart of Appalachia. The meeting was initiated by Appalshop to secure an opportunity to ask specific questions about FIERCE's organizational model and how it supports youth leadership and decision-making. It was an opportunity for FIERCE to hear from Appalshop about the local conditions of stark isolation in Appalachia and how a national network could authentically uplift and support Appalshop's work. Appalshop expressed deep interest in collaborating to organize a rural LGBTQ youth gathering in their region. From this initial meeting, we invited youth from the Stay Project to be a part of a national cohort we coordinated to come to the Creating Change conference in Houston in January 2013. Other organizations a part of the cohort were: SONG: Southerners On New Ground, QUIP: Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project, and Detroit Represent. **This cohort represented geographically marginalized groups that work from an intersectional framework**. FIERCE's coordination of this cohort supported these groups accessing Creating Change, which for some groups would be inaccessible otherwise. The cohort shared their work with each other at a lunch FIERCE organized at Creating Change in addition to attending FIERCE's skill-building workshops on

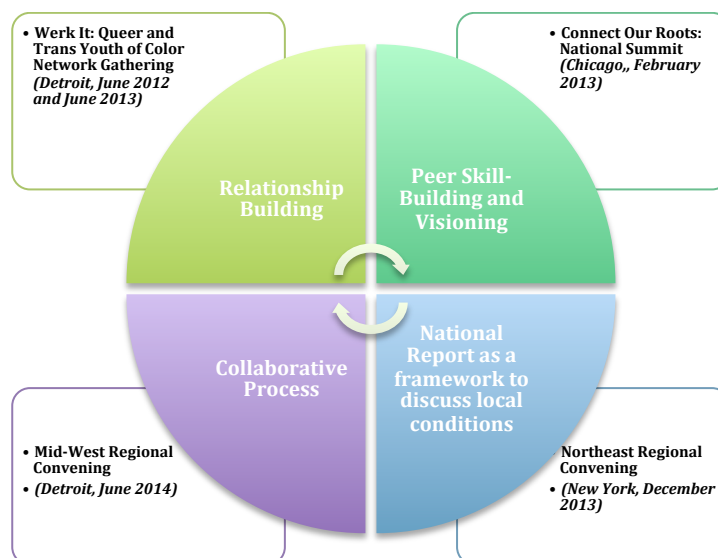
base-building and youth media making. The cohort expressed interest in supporting FIERCE in implementing a regional strategy for targeted movement building and strengthening LGBTQ youth leadership on a national scale.

This past June, we held our second regional convening, a Mid-West regional gathering in conjunction with the 2014 Allied Media Conference in Detroit. This regionally-focused network gathering was a space for LGBTQ youth of color from the Mid-West to not only share their experiences, work and organizing strategies, but also to dig deeper into naming, understanding and connecting local conditions across the region. We also linked those local conditions and work to a national context using findings from FIERCE's report, *Moving Up, Fighting Back: Creating a Path to LGBTQ Liberation*.

The great success of the Mid-West regional convening was marked by incredible relationship building and inspired strategizing due to the following key components:

- A 10-week Cross-Organizational Youth-led Collaborative Organizing Process
- Providing an accessible National Framework utilizing FIERCE's national report: *Moving Up, Fighting Back: Creating a Path to LGBTQ Liberation*
- Identifying shared priority issues across organizations through understanding local conditions in the region

Through organizing 5 national gatherings in the last two years, FIERCE's key learning is in the **evolution of a model** for queer and trans youth of color skill-building, networking and multi-issue political education and landscape analysis. Key components of Relationship Building, Peer Skill-Building & Visioning, using FIERCE's National Report on the LGBTQ Youth Organizing Landscape as an accessible framework for diving into local conditions, and having a cross-organizational collaborative process amongst LGBTQ youth leaders to organize the gathering itself, including agenda, curriculum, and facilitation – these key components built off of each other after each of FIERCE's gatherings to strengthen and enhance the next:



Key accomplishments in skill and capacity building through these convening's that reached over 200 LGBTQ youth of color have been in the areas of political education and landscape analysis, increased

facilitation skills, networking skills, base-building and campaign development skills, and leadership development of LGBTQ youth through transformative exercises around visioning and identifying opportunities for solidarity and collaboration. Streetwise and Safe and BreakOUT came together and came up with the Get Yr Rights network at FIERCE's day-long (and Allied Media Conference's first) queer and trans youth of color network gathering in 2012.

Our launch of our national report, *Moving Up, Fighting Back: Creating A Path to LGBTQ Youth Liberation* reached over 1,000 people at Creating Change on a panel with Suzanne Pharr of Southerners on New Ground who was releasing SONG's *Small Town Crossroads Report*. The panel was moderated by J Bob. Alotta, Executive Director of the Astraea Foundation and was livestreamed. Moving forward, we have successfully secured a day-long LGBTQ youth of color organizing institute at Creating Change for the February 2015 conference. We are excited to continue to provide this much needed space by and for LGBTQ Youth of Color to engage with each other as peers, leaders and solution makers, building resiliency through affirming, youth led spaces.

Goal: Continue to Build FIERCE's Internal Capacity to Achieve Our National Program Goals

FIERCE recently adopted a new organizing structure, that is based on weekly committee meetings for individualized campaigns, a staff and member rapid response team and monthly cross-campaign collective meeting. The new structure also includes Fred Ginyard's promotion to the role of Organizing Director. Fred Ginyard joined FIERCE as the National Program Coordinator in July 2013 and comes to FIERCE with 15 years of Direct Action Policy Organizing experience. Fred successfully developed TNT, i.e. The National Team structure as the youth-led committee for FIERCE's national program. TNT has been a thriving committee and TNT members have developed an array of leadership skills as they have developed curriculum for our gatherings, facilitated, and led our social media and networking strategies. Some TNT members have gone through cohort-based leadership development intensives, a model we have used for deeper skill building and project based opportunities.

FIERCE's National Program relies on the strength and vitality of our local political power. Various external factors (the recession, Hurricane Sandy) impacted FIERCE's long standing local campaign work in considerable ways. This was followed by intentional and substantial amount of time looking to catalyze cultural and structural change in our organization, which also meant creating space for long standing staff to transition out in a respectful and non-detrimental way. FIERCE's new organizing structure successfully directs internal capacity for critical advancement in our local campaign work.

A central finding of a program assessment of FIERCE's national program by members and key staff, conducted with the support of SEED, a technical assistance organization specializing in impact-based evaluation, was "Our local campaign work should be building our political power to be in national arenas. We must have the ability to mobilize hundreds of LGBTQ youth locally to have any type of impact on a national level, especially national policies. At the same time we must be using our local campaign work and victories to support the relationships we're building locally, regionally and nationally."

As we focus our energy on advancing local city-wide political gains, we are re-orienting to the goals of the National program based on our current capacity and organizational priorities of advancing city-wide reform related to Quality of Life policing. We must pause the current approach to our National work, of regional base-building as a strategy for national capacity building and issue-identification, as a significant increase in staff capacity is required for regional networks to have sustained momentum as well as significant increase in resources are needed to support grassroots organizations across the country to sustain effective momentum.

As we move forward, we are excited for the vision and strategy underway in our local campaign work and have no doubt that our movement-building and national capacity building work will evolve out of the success of our upcoming cultural and policy wins in New York City. These shifts will solidify and take shape in the summer of 2015 when FIERCE's local campaign work is slated to be past initial phases of participatory action research and foundational partnerships for target and strategy identification.