



# YOUmedia CHICAGO

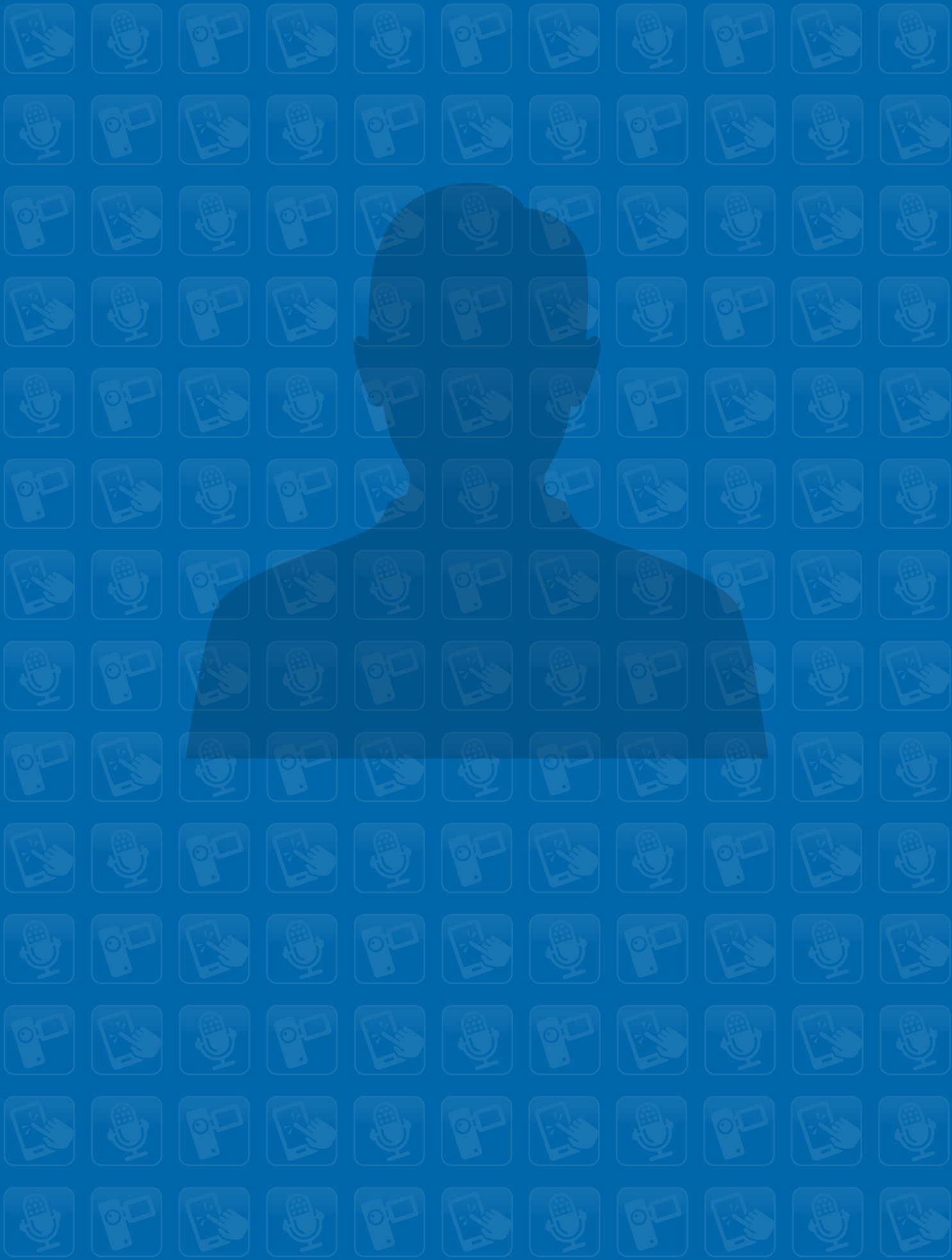
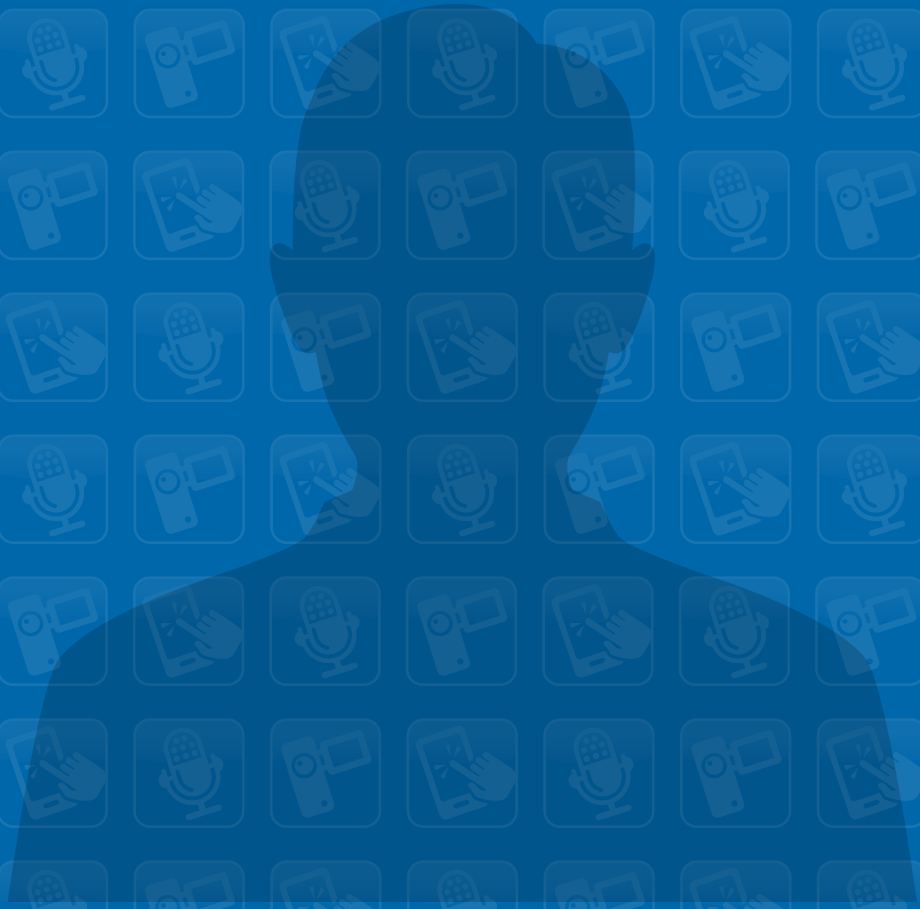
Reimagining Learning,  
Literacies, and Libraries:  
A Snapshot of Year 1



**Authors:** Kimberly Austin, Stacy B. Ehrlich, Cassidy Puckett,  
and Judi Singleton **Contributors:** Susan E. Spote,  
Penny Bender Sebring, Denise C. Nacu, and Eric Brown



CONSORTIUM ON  
CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
URBAN EDUCATION INSTITUTE





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# Executive Summary: Year 1

**YOUmedia, a Chicago-based digital learning initiative for teens, was designed to motivate youth to create, innovate, and become active learners.**

Digital media has captured the attention of young people across the country. Often, the tools they use and the activities they engage in—computers, smartphones, video games, digital music, and the like—are viewed as entertainment. Yet educators in schools, libraries, and other institutions are beginning to realize the potential for using digital media to motivate youth to create, innovate, and become active learners.

To explore this potential more deliberately, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Chicago Public Library, and the Digital Youth Network joined forces to launch YOUmedia, a digital learning initiative for high school-aged teens. YOUmedia is a physical space at the Harold Washington Library Center in downtown Chicago, as well as a virtual place—a website—dedicated to YOUmedia users. Both are designed to draw teens into progressive levels of participation in digital and traditional media.

According to a recent study of teens and technology, the first level of digital media participation, “hanging out,” is primarily social and friendship driven. Further along the continuum is “messing around,” where teens’ interest in digital media takes a more concrete form as skills develop from their own interests. Finally, “geeking out” is the advanced level where teens’ interests are specialized, they develop expertise in digital skills, and they may join or create sub-cultures around these domains.

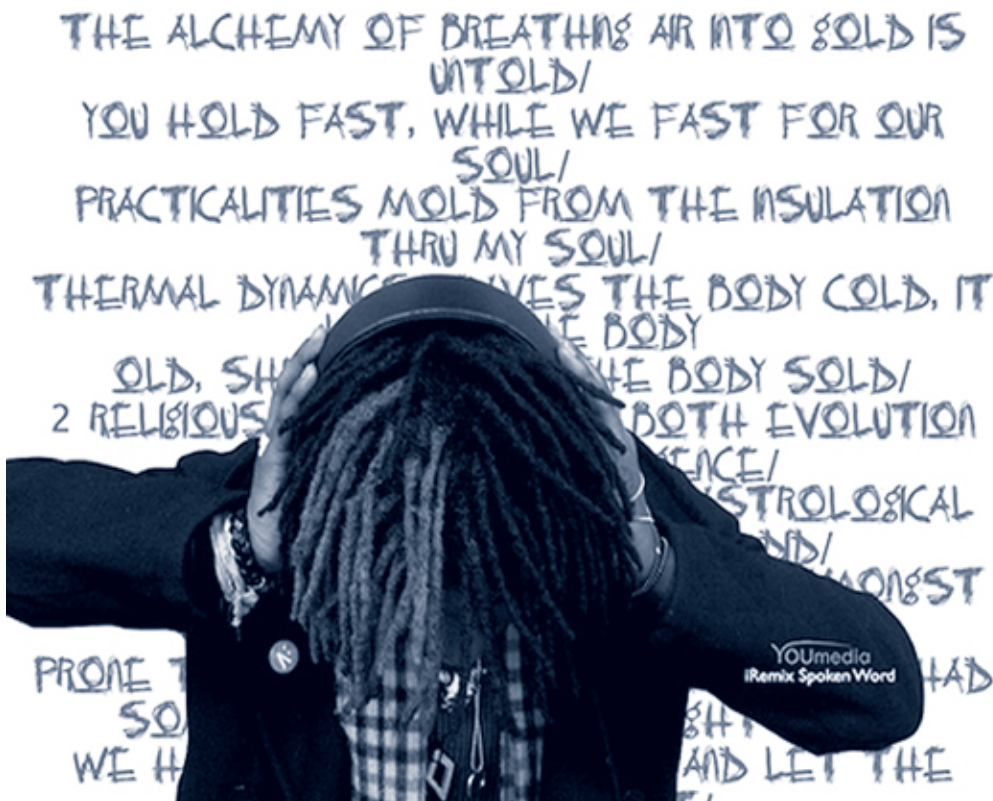
At the library, YOUmedia’s physical space is designed to accommodate each of these stages. The space offers brightly colored lounging furniture, as well as computers for browsing and social use; gaming consoles, digital music equipment, and audio production computer software that can be used according to interest; and a serious work space that includes modular conference tables and a SMART board. These tools and structures afford teens the opportunity to socialize, to explore, or to master increasingly complex skills. Likewise, YOUmedia’s online presence uses a closed social networking platform to offer teens 24-hour access to a site where they can use digital media across the gamut of engagement, from casual to intense participation.

This report is the first in a series that will document a three-year exploration of YOUmedia. In this installment—intended to introduce YOUmedia to a wider community of those interested in digital media and youth development, including researchers, funders, and educators—we describe Year 1 experiences and assess early lessons. We explore how teens discovered YOUmedia and the variety of ways in which they interacted with the space. We identify obstacles encountered during YOUmedia’s initial implementation (from fall 2009 through summer 2010) and examine programmatic responses to those challenges. We also examine what worked, and, in doing so, identify aspects of the program that were not initially anticipated to be useful but were found to be necessary for ensuring effective use of digital media by teens as an instrument to learn critical skills.

In order to develop a clear understanding of how YOUmedia developed, we logged 130 hours over nine months in the physical space, observing activities and informally interviewing teens. At the end of the year, we conducted formal interviews with teens, adult mentors, librarians, and security guards who worked at YOUmedia’s library location. This decidedly qualitative look at YOUmedia’s Year 1 launch resulted in the following four major observations:

**Relationships, particularly between youth and adult mentors, are crucial in engaging teens toward productive growth.** The initial theory of action for YOUmedia assumed that interacting with digital media tools and participating in activities centered on teens’ interests would yield positive results around learning goals. During the first year, however, YOUmedia staff found that teens left on their own did not automatically connect with workshops and other structured activities that were designed to teach new skills and provide opportunities to explore interests more deeply. That changed when adults reached out to connect with youth socially, acting as guides and “cool” collaborators.

**YOUmedia is cultivating a budding sense of community among teens who socialize and explore resources in the library.** Peer relationships and an emerging sense of community served as a potent force that drove teens to engage with digital technology in new ways. YOUmedia encouraged teens to socialize, exchange ideas, and collaborate and share with their peers. Teens have come to view YOUmedia as a unique learning environment—one that does away with the formalities of high school so that they feel free to explore their interests and express themselves.



Year 1 implementation created a dynamic learning environment for teens who participated. Flexibility among staff and fluid processes around programming facilitated youth involvement at all participation levels. This flexibility was apparent when mentors shifted away from an adult-structured model of teaching and activity design towards a model that was more closely tied to what teens wanted to learn and how they wanted to learn it. Responsive formal learning opportunities—as well as informal, purposeful interactions—increased participation, expanded social networks, and deepened the teens’ understanding and use of digital and traditional media.

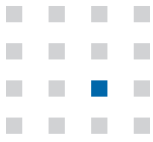
Several challenges were evident in Year 1. Like all new organizations, YOUmedia faced some challenges in its first year. Organizationally, it struggled with internal communication and role clarity, especially among part-time staff. Like other activities based on voluntary participation, it faced inconsistent attendance over time, making it difficult to sustain coherence. The online space, which was intended to motivate production and critique, was not well utilized. Resource availability and maintenance seem to be ongoing issues, from the choice of software utilization to the replacement and repair of equipment that is susceptible to breakage.

As YOUmedia moves into its second and third years, we expect to build on this introductory overview by continuing to track how the project evolves. We will explore ways in which engagement in YOUmedia may be linked to a variety of learning outcomes, and the extent to which similar activities may be occurring in schools—the traditional learning environment for youth.



The use of digital media can support an expanded and more contemporary view of the learning goals necessary for successful citizenship in the twenty-first century.





# Introduction

At a time when digital media and its technologies continue to inform the ways youth socialize, play, and learn, YOUmedia was designed as a digital media center of learning for teens.

The use of digital media can support an expanded and more contemporary view of the learning goals necessary for successful citizenship in the twenty-first century. Among these new goals are learning and innovation skills; information, media, and technology skills; life and career skills; and content around core subjects.

On the vanguard is YOUmedia, a digital learning initiative that aims to build on teens' interest in and use of digital media to support these deeper learning goals. Sponsored by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, YOUmedia is implementing ideas that grew out of research supported by the foundation's Digital Media and Learning Initiative.<sup>1</sup> In turn, the foundation is sponsoring the study of YOUmedia that is the subject of this report.

To understand the frequency with which youth interact with digital media (see sidebar "Definitions" on page 9 for explanations of digital media and other key terms), consider this: Students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) spend only 5.5 hours a day in school but, on average, eight to 18-year-olds in the United States spend seven hours and 38 minutes *each day* using all kinds of media.<sup>2</sup> Within this time frame, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that young people spend an average of 1.5 hours a day on a computer and a little over one hour per day on video games.<sup>3</sup> Despite inequities around access to broadband at home, the vast majority of American youth have daily access to the Internet, with some minority populations gaining their access at libraries.<sup>4</sup> Beyond popular images of youth obsessively updating social networking pages or engrossed in online gaming worlds is the reality that teens also use the technologies of digital media to create. A recent Pew survey reported that 57 percent of youth who use digital media produce blogs, websites, art, stories, videos, or remixes.<sup>5</sup>

Researchers theorize that interacting with digital media can provide significant motivation for youth to participate, create, and become active learners.<sup>6</sup> By allowing youth to directly create, share, revise, and publish their own work, digital media



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Source: Kaiser Family Foundation (2010).

can influence learning in ways that textbooks, lectures, and older generations of technology can not. Digital media shifts the dominant form of content broadcast from a few collective entities to a single audience—think traditional television and radio—towards multiple individuals and collectivities sending content to multiple audiences.<sup>7</sup> Thus, with digital media, the relationships between producer, broadcaster, and audience are multi-directional. The modality of these interactions and the ease with which people can now publish their own work and comment on the work of others creates opportunities for teens to be active producers of media, rather than confining their role to being passive consumers of media.<sup>8</sup>

The freedom to publicly broadcast original and shared content simultaneously to many people also allows producers to receive timely feedback and critique at various stages of their work's creation. Theory suggests that engaging in such feedback loops may support active learning as youth undertake an iterative process of revising their work. By capitalizing on the ways in which youth are already using digital media, educators have the chance to support them in learning to critically think through obstacles that may arise as they produce and publish original work. This iterative process of incorporating feedback and critique into their products and improving on their work also provides an opportunity for youth to develop self-expression and self-efficacy as they learn how to set and achieve their own goals.

Currently, the learning that takes place around the use of digital media appears to be largely organic, arising serendipitously online and through collaborations with friends. However, with the ample learning opportunities presented by the use of digital media, it is also apparent that there exists a need to teach youth how to be literate consumers of media products, as well as how to effectively use digital media tools. Developing these digital literacies in high school is becoming more essential in preparing students for a future that promises to be increasingly complex—dominated by multi-dimensional layers of digital technologies and formats. Recognizing this need, the National Assessment of Educational Progress will in 2012 begin administering an assessment of technological literacy to fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-graders. This nationwide push to accelerate digital literacy is one aspect of a larger mission to equip young people with twenty-first century skills. Furthermore, in recent speeches, President Barack Obama has called particular attention to opportunities to develop these lifelong skills in settings beyond classrooms.<sup>9, 10</sup>



In keeping with these trends, in 2009, the Chicago Public Library (CPL), with support from the MacArthur Foundation, launched YOUmedia, an experiment in providing useful and engaging learning experiences for teens in high school through access to new and traditional media.

YOUmedia is both a specially designed physical space located in the Harold Washington Library Center in downtown Chicago and an intentionally designed online space. In both YOUmedia environments, teens can pursue their own interests while developing digital and traditional media skills in ways that are substantively different from the experiences typically afforded to them by their schools or other public institutions. At the library and on its website, high school youth can hang out with friends, and discover and pursue their interests through such collaborative and solitary activities as blogging, writing and sharing poetry, playing and building electronic games, producing music and videos, and participating in book clubs. Adult staff provide guidance, instruction, support, and connections to resources. Projects promote cooperation and community awareness. Special events open the door for youth to collaborate with and learn from established artists, authors, and experts. Youth can also perform and share their work in other ways. As one observer said, “YOUmedia is loud, sociable, and hip—but it’s still all about the public mission of the library to serve as a point of access to culture, information, and media of the day.”<sup>11</sup>

YOUmedia is the subject of a three-year research study, by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute, that is funded by the MacArthur Foundation. This first report is a snapshot of this evolving program. Rather than a presentation of Year 1 findings, this first look at YOUmedia introduces the project to a wider audience of educators,

“YOUmedia was created to connect young adults, books, media, mentors, and institutions throughout the city of Chicago in one dynamic space designed to inspire collaboration and creativity.”

— YOUmedia

researchers, and funders by capturing the experiences of teen and adult participants and assessing the early lessons of those experiences that are relevant to future implementation. Some early observations include:

- Shifts in the project’s initial theory of action to further emphasize the important role of relationships, both among youth and between youth and adult mentors, in engaging youth more effectively around learning goals when they use digital media.
- The role that flexibility and fluidity plays in providing youth with relevant experiences and supporting their learning in meaningful ways.
- The emergence of new communities of youth within YOUmedia who are organized around shared interests that hold promise for motivating youth to learn critical skills.
- Challenges around balancing a youth-driven approach with an adult agenda for learning.

This report on YOUmedia is part of a larger study of Chicago middle and high school students’ experiences with digital media and how these experiences may influence their development. The goals are to understand the conception and roll-out of YOUmedia, and then to begin to examine the relationships between students’ work with digital media and their attitudes, behaviors, habits, and learning. CCSR researchers will explore these questions through student responses to its biennial district-wide survey and students’ school records, and through observations and surveys of and interviews with YOUmedia participants. The ultimate purpose is to develop a better understanding of how digital media can be leveraged to meet traditional and new learning goals.

YOUmedia is the first of its kind, but more centers are on the way. President Obama recently announced that the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the MacArthur Foundation will fund the creation of 30 more YOUmedia centers across the country. Additionally, CPL will soon open three new YOUmedia centers in library branches across the city. Observations and implications noted in this study will be relevant to those wishing to understand teen learning outside of schools, as well as to diverse organizations that are considering or planning to roll-out YOUmedia sites in the future.

## Definitions

**DIGITAL MEDIA** Those technologies that allow users to create new forms of interaction, expression, communication, and entertainment in a digital format.<sup>12</sup> Such technologies include computers, digital cameras, smartphones, digital music production, and video games.

**DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY** There are various definitions of technological and digital literacy, but we define digital media literacy based on the outcomes outlined by the 21st Century Partnership.<sup>13</sup> Digital media literacy encompasses three aspects: information literacy; media literacy; and information, communications, and technology (ICT) literacy. Information literacy captures the ability to access, evaluate, and use information effectively for an issue or problem. Media literacy is the ability to both critically analyze media messages and understand and utilize appropriate media creation tools, taking into account a diverse, multi-cultural society. Lastly, ICT literacy is the ability to use technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate, and communicate information. In addition, it encompasses using digital tools (e.g., computers, PDAs, media players, GPS), networking tools, and social networks appropriately to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information to successfully function in a knowledge economy.

**FACEBOOK** A social networking service that allows people to message and chat with each other, tag others in their photos, comment on each others' pictures and videos, and play multi-user games.

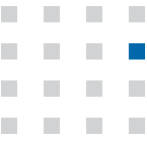
**GARAGEBAND** A software program that allows users to create music or podcasts.

**MANGA** A type of Japanese comic or print cartoon.

**MPC (MUSIC PRODUCTION CENTER) PLAYER** A production tool that allows users to create “beats” and songs by sequencing existing rhythm tracks and instrumental audio, and to import audio files.

**PROTOOLS** A software program, used by many professionals, that allows for digital music editing and production.

**ROCK BAND** A music video game that allows players to use instrument-like controllers to simulate playing popular songs. The “band” can be up to four participants, including a vocalist, lead guitarist, bass guitarist, and drummer.



## What Is YOUmedia?

“YOUmedia is a gathering space for teens to come together.”

“It provides teens with a space to get their creative side out and express themselves.”

— Descriptions from youth participants

YOUmedia is a learning space for teens that combines the expertise and resources of the Chicago Public Library (CPL) and the Digital Youth Network (DYN), a digital media literacy program that provides in-school and out-of-school learning opportunities. YOUmedia’s learning environment is comprised of a physical location and an online space for teens to interact with traditional and digital media. Months of planning and development by the MacArthur Foundation, CPL, DYN, and other strategic partners led to YOUmedia opening a physical location and an online space in summer 2009. (See sidebar “YOUmedia Partners” on page 12 for further information.)

### Design of YOUmedia’s Physical Space



YOUmedia’s design team imagined a physical space that was accessible, attractive, and engaging to teens. Housed in CPL’s main branch, the Harold Washington Library Center, YOUmedia occupies a 5,500-square-foot space on the ground floor of the library, making it visible to passersby. Located in Chicago’s Loop, YOUmedia faces historic State Street, which features a mix of retail stores, restaurants, public institutions, and colleges and universities. YOUmedia is near several public transportation routes that make the space accessible from Chicago’s neighborhoods.

This space, which is the first space ever in any CPL branch to be dedicated to teens, is an instantiation of three forms of digital media participation—“hanging out,” “messing around,” and “geeking out”—that were identified through research conducted by Mimi Ito et al.<sup>14</sup> Their three-year ethnographic project observed youth face-to-face and online to investigate the dynamics between new media, culture, and learning among young adults and teens. Comprising 23 field sites that span homes and neighborhoods, learning institutions (e.g., after-school programs), online communities and other networked sites, and interest-based groups in the United States, the study found that cultural engagement and learning are propelled as youth “hang out,” “mess around,” and “geek out” with digital media. YOUmedia’s design team sought to fashion a physical space that would reflect these distinct forms of participation and support learning.



### “Hanging Out”

This category of participation represents those who engage in social participation with or around digital media.<sup>15</sup> This form of participation is often friendship-driven. In the physical space, the hanging out section is defined by bright red, yellow, and green couches, cushioned rocking chairs, and plush bean bag chairs. This space offers a place for teens to check Facebook on laptops, play games like Rock Band, and even eat while on the green flooring. This section also houses the main part of the library’s young adult book collection that students may browse while socializing with peers.

### “Messing Around”

Teens who are “messaging around” display a budding interest in digital media. This may be the result of an independent emergent interest or one driven by friendship ties. These youth tend to have particular skills around digital media that can apply to different domains. The YOUmedia messing around space is identified by red flooring, and also has a gaming console, plush seating, and books (mostly reference materials and Japanese comic books called manga). Unlike the hanging out section, this space has kiosks with PC and Mac desktops that contain production software. A studio also provides tools to produce music and other audio recordings, including a desktop computer with ProTools and GarageBand, an MPC player, a microphone and speakers, and other equipment for audio production.

### “Geeking Out”

When teens are “geeking out” with digital media, their engagement stems from their interests in developing specialized forms of expertise. This might also include involvement with particular sub-cultures or interest-driven communities within specific domains. Designed as a more serious work space, the geeking out area at YOUmedia is located far from the chatter of the hanging out space. It features moveable conference tables, dry erase boards, and a SMART board. Here, as throughout the space, teens can use laptops, cameras, and other digital equipment to make digital media products.

...a physical location and an online space for teens to interact with traditional and digital media.

## YOUmedia Partners

### JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

One of the nation's largest independent foundations, the MacArthur Foundation provides the funding for YOUmedia as part of its larger Digital Media and Learning (DML) Initiative. This \$50-million initiative, launched in 2006, seeks to understand how digital technologies are changing the way youth learn and participate in civic life. This initiative aims to increase understanding of how to bridge the ways learning and teaching occur in schools and other social institutions with how youth are learning today. For more on the DML Initiative funded by MacArthur, visit [http://digitallearning.macfound.org/site/enJLKQNIFIG/b.2029319/k.4E7B/About\\_the\\_Initiative.htm](http://digitallearning.macfound.org/site/enJLKQNIFIG/b.2029319/k.4E7B/About_the_Initiative.htm).

**CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY (CPL)** The Chicago Public Library, established in 1872, aims to provide patrons with resources that support lifelong learning. More than providing books and other texts, CPL hosts a number of community events; offers targeted services for children, adults, and other groups; and supplies access to movies, music, and museums, along with other media and activities. For more on CPL, visit <http://www.chipublib.org>.



**DIGITAL YOUTH NETWORK (DYN)** Dr. Nichole Pinkard developed this school-based digital media literacy program. In 2010, DYN expanded to include seven schools, as well as a production studio, on Chicago's South Side. The program, also funded by the MacArthur Foundation, creates learning opportunities related to digital media literacy that span the school day and after-school programs. DYN's model of digital media literacy emphasizes production, collaboration, critique, and civic engagement using digital media tools. For more on DYN, visit <http://iremix.org>.

**PEARSON FOUNDATION** This charitable arm of Pearson, a multi-national media conglomerate, works with non-profits and business organizations to influence learning and teaching. As a sponsor of YOUmedia, the Pearson Foundation has helped provide programming for the site. For more information on Pearson's support of YOUmedia, visit <http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/youth-engagement/partnerships/you-media-chicago-public-library.html>.



## Partnership Development: Considerations for Implementation of New YOUmedia Centers

The MacArthur Foundation gauged the interest of the Chicago Public Library (CPL) regarding the possibility of creating a library space downtown around the use of various forms of media—digital and traditional media. Having previous notions for a “teen space” in the library, CPL responded enthusiastically. The result: a vision for an engaging digital media space for teens in the downtown location of CPL. Once CPL was on board, MacArthur took several strategic steps to guide the development of the remaining partnerships.

### Flexibility in finding the “right” partners that builds upon prior research and applied work

- 1 The funding organization thought broadly about what each organization could bring to the partnership and to the vision of YOUmedia. Several partners were considered before finding the right fit.
- 2 The YOUmedia partnership was one that was mutually beneficial, supporting the fact that each partner has a stake in the relationship.
- 3 YOUmedia was fashioned both after DYN’s approach to teaching digital media literacy and after research by Mimi Ito et al.<sup>16, 17</sup> This research helped to provide a framework that merged the approaches of CPL, which provides an informal setting, with DYN’s more structured learning environment.

### Building on prior relationships and developing confidence in a new, merged vision

- 1 YOUmedia brought together people and organizations that had prior experience working together.

- 2 Prior to the opening of YOUmedia, CPL and DYN engaged in a pilot period during which the organizations worked together to offer activities to a small group of teens in limited space. Seeing success under these minimal conditions developed a shared conviction that their larger venture would be successful.

### Commitment to innovation and redefining existing boundaries

As the YOUmedia partnership merged the diverse expertise of each partner organization, all partners involved were willing to depart from existing organizational paradigms and redefine their boundaries. New partnerships require that each institution meld into the broader vision. In YOUmedia, examples include:

- 1 CPL reimagined a number of permissible activities. These included being able to eat and drink, the volume at which people were allowed to talk and listen to audio, what belongings had to be stored in lockers, and even how books and other printed text were placed throughout the new space.
- 2 DYN was also pushed to reframe their existing ideas of the role of adults in the space. In DYN’s after-school model, students participated in a session or class where an adult worked with them around a set of objectives; however, participants who are voluntarily in a public space are free to simply hang out. DYN mentors were now charged with a different role.

(See Appendix A for further descriptions of these negotiations.)

# YOUmedia

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## YOUmedia Design

### YOUmedia philosophy

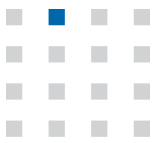
The Chicago Public Library, in collaboration with the Digital Youth Network, created the YOUmedia teen space to expand digital learning opportunities for high school students. YOUmedia's philosophy is to:

- + Ensure that teens possess a fundamental understanding of the various **modes of communication** that comprise the new media landscape.
- + Help students learn the **tasks and roles** associated with each mode of communication, which happens most powerfully when they take on multiple roles in the creation of new media artifacts.

## Intentional Design of YOUmedia Online

In contrast to the physical space, YOUmedia has an online presence which is accessible 24 hours a day. It is a closed social networking site (meaning that you must sign up to participate) built on a platform called Remix World, the same platform DYN uses in its programming. Like other social networks, YOUmedia online allows teens to create personal pages, join online groups, post and comment on multimedia, and message their peers. But unlike other social networks, YOUmedia online was designed with explicit pedagogical and motivational purposes. As one member of the online design team explained, YOUmedia online intentionally uses “culture, context, and expectations” to promote learning through incentives and feedback. Teens can earn virtual currency called “Remix dollars” as rewards for posting original content and posting feedback on the work of others. They can then use their Remix dollars to purchase USB flash drives, Borders and iTunes gift cards, iPods, Rock Band, Akai synthesizers, and other items. The feedback system—encompassing opportunities for open comments and a rating system—was designed to encourage and improve production, and therefore extend learning opportunities. In this first year of our research, we had limited access to log-in data from the online site. However, we plan on incorporating data from online usage in the upcoming years.

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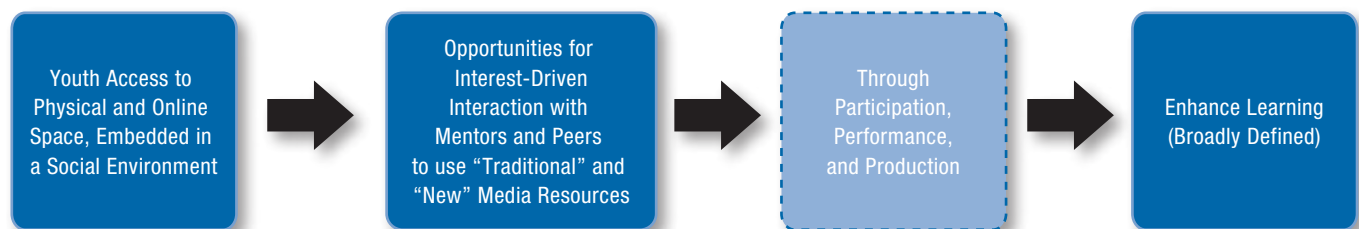
# YOUmedia as Initially Conceptualized and then Realized

Rather than the initial theory that learning would result from access to a set of tools and social conditions, a cycle of learning emerged that was generated by flexibility, relationships, and responsiveness.

## Initial Theory and Intended Outcomes

The physical and online design reflects the broad consensus YOUmedia’s founding partners reached regarding their vision for this new organization. As they worked through the logistical details of building a new kind of organizational and programmatic entity, these partners identified mechanisms through which they thought YOUmedia would accomplish a set of generally agreed-upon goals. The research team captured much of this early vision through retrospective interviews with leaders of CPL, DYN, and the MacArthur Foundation. From these interviews, CCSR developed a representation of their theory of action. Figure 1 below depicts the main pieces of this initial theory: Youth having access to a space embedded in a social environment would provide opportunities for interest-driven interaction. Participation, performance, and production would then mediate how these interactions led to enhanced learning.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Theory of Action**



Leadership envisioned that the impact of YOUmedia would begin with providing youth access to purposefully designed physical and online spaces. Relying on research suggesting that the majority of teens “hang out” with technology, the configuration of furniture, technology, and youth-centered resources into distinct participation spaces (hanging out, messing around, and geeking out) was intended

YOUmedia was viewed as a new kind of social environment that would encourage youth to move from a point of casual exploration of interests towards more serious and sustained engagement in new forms of learning.

to encourage young people to engage with digital media in formal and informal ways while moving those less seriously engaged towards more serious forms of participation with technology. The ultimate goal was for them to produce their own digital media products. In short, although it was not directly measured by the program, the desired outcome was to move a portion of interested youth towards geeking out with digital media, knowing that not all teens would be as committed to moving in that direction. The online space was meant to extend what occurred in the physical space and to provide other forms of motivation for students to collaborate on projects, present work publicly, and critique digital media. As a whole, YOUmedia was viewed as a new kind of social environment that would encourage youth to move from a point of casual—and perhaps serendipitous—exploration of interests towards more serious and sustained engagement in new forms of learning.

Designers thought that the motivation for youth to move towards deeper pursuits would be social in nature. Building from an understanding of teens as highly social and driven by friendships and interests,<sup>18</sup> YOUmedia was intended to be a place where curiosity would be sparked simply by being there. This would occur on two levels. First, access to traditional and new media resources would enable youth to participate in activities that were meaningful and relevant to them. Second, given the social nature of the space, YOUmedia would provide a context for teens to observe and interact with more experienced peers; this would, in turn, motivate teens to try something new, including production and performance activities.

Ultimately, the designers of YOUmedia hoped that access to media within a social context would provide wide-ranging benefits to participants, not just how to use the media. However, it was difficult for leadership to define those outcomes as discrete goals. Overall, goals conveyed by all leadership members were broad, learning-based ideas. When asked to articulate their desired goals, leadership members offered the following:

“We can talk about [goals] kind of as intangibles to some extent, but [they] really are kind of still core skills, so, we can say that this kid is really investing time and really exploring, learning how to express himself in different ways, learning the tool[s]....Being able to adapt to different ways to communicate, ways to explore, ways to research, ways to express yourself. These are very key skills when you now are in much more of a media-driven, and reliant, society.”

—DYN Leadership

“[One] outcome that I hope comes out of it is this understanding that you learn for a lifetime. You don’t stop learning when school ends. Life is made of second chances and third chances. Just because you have an interest and you don’t see a path for yourself, there is a path somewhere. We’re happy to help facilitate that.”

—CPL Leadership

“[Among other things] it’s about showing up, it’s about being part of a community, it’s about follow-through, it’s about caring about something that isn’t obligatory, it’s about writing for peers.... There’s a whole set of cultural capital that the mentors [can help] the kids pick up.”

—MacArthur Leadership

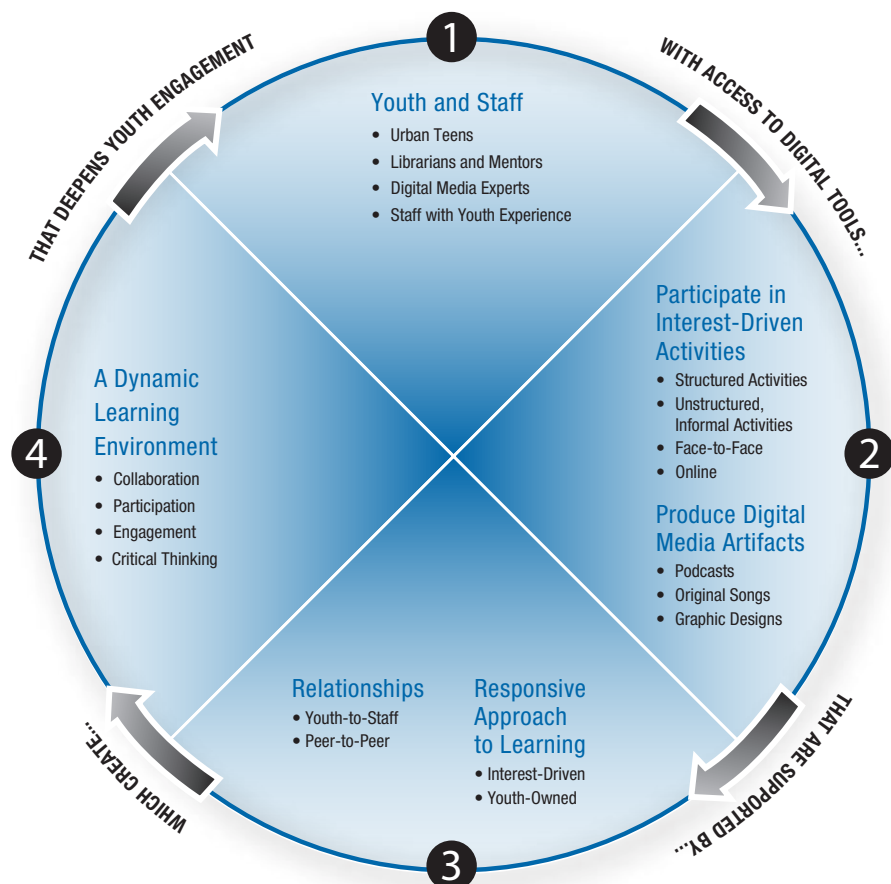
While these responses represent the broader learning goals leadership envisioned for teens participating in YOUmedia, other outcomes were mentioned as well. For example, one additional goal was to build teens’ confidence and sense of self-efficacy through the mastery of new skills, exposure to creating their own work, and the ability to teach other teens about digital media. Another articulated goal was to increase traditional and digital literacy. Finally, ancillary goals included increasing the use of the library as a space for learning, fostering critical thinking skills and twenty-first century skills, and developing critical and educated consumers of media.

## YOUmedia as Observed

Although it is important to understand the theory of action and goals underlying YOUmedia, CCSR was also charged with conducting independent research to develop a clear understanding of how YOUmedia actually developed over time. The research team visited YOUmedia several times a week over a nine-month period to observe activities and informally interview teens and staff, accumulating more than 130 hours of observation. Near the end of the school year, the team conducted formal interviews with 20 teens who visited the physical location and 15 interviews with all in-space staff members, including mentors and librarians, as well as several security personnel (see Appendix B for data collection methods); we also conducted a focus group of stakeholders in the late summer to comment on our emergent findings. Based on our analysis of these data, we developed a model to capture the first year’s implementation and to explore any possible differences between this analytic model and the initial model as theorized by the founders.

Figure 2 shows the model based on our observations. The main elements of the initial theory are still included: youth have access to physical space in which to “hang out,” “mess around,” and “geek out,” which is supported by an online community; there are interest-driven interactions between adults and teens and among teens; and there is individual growth. The theorized mechanisms—a social environment where teens are encouraged to participate, perform, and produce—are also evident. However, our observed model notes additional layers of detail, complexity, and nuance. In particular, it highlights the interactive, responsive, and dynamic nature of the environment and the crucial role of both peer-to-peer and youth-staff relationships, all of which feed into a learning cycle rather than a linear process of learning. In the sections below, we describe the components outlined in Figure 2 more fully.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Observed Model of YOUmedia**





# Animating the Space: Youth and Staff at YOUmedia

Staff relied on their varied expertise and experiences to connect with and support a youth population with a diverse set of interests.

The intentional design of YOUmedia structured the social context for learning, while the actions and interactions of teens and staff motivated learning and engagement. Yet, the question of exactly who would populate YOUmedia was left largely unstated. YOUmedia was simply open to teens of high school age. Less of an uncertainty was the desired skill sets and knowledge of staff who would guide YOUmedia's learning environment. This section relies on evidence from the first year of YOUmedia to understand who visits YOUmedia and the role of staff—a mix of CPL librarians and DYN mentors—in sustaining this participation.



## Youth: Discovering YOUmedia and Participating in the Program

The mechanisms for attracting youth to the space were not articulated in the initial theory of action, and YOUmedia did not make any specific attempts to recruit youth from particular areas, schools, or backgrounds. Instead, chance sightings and word of mouth appeared to be the major ways in which youth discovered YOUmedia. In formal and informal interviews, teens described learning about YOUmedia through friends, parents, and teachers. Others were intentionally seeking out resources—either at the library or elsewhere in Chicago—in an effort to pursue a specific interest, and found that YOUmedia had tools or workshops that supported those interests. Another group simply stumbled upon YOUmedia as they walked around the downtown area.

“I told one of my friends who raps....He said that he was going downtown to this library but he was going upstairs to the second floor to get on the computer and do some research. I told him that he could come to this space, do his project, and then he could go in the recording studio... 'cause he raps with his brother.”

—Youth #2



“I heard about the library location through the website. I basically just kind of researched poetry [online] 'cause that's what I do. And so I wanted to see if there were any upcoming poetry events [at YOUmedia]...if they had anything like that for teens.”

—Youth #17

Once people began discovering YOUmedia, youth from all over the city began to visit. Program designers imagined YOUmedia's downtown location as an advantage and, for many, YOUmedia was a central location that was easily accessible. However, some teens, particularly those from the far South and West Sides of Chicago, reported that the distance was a barrier to more frequent YOUmedia visits. These teens reported lacking fare for public transportation and other ways to get there, making it more difficult to travel to YOUmedia regularly.<sup>19</sup>

“It is a long ways to travel from my house. But if I have a bus card, then I'm up here as much as possible. It was a couple of weeks I came everyday 'cause I had a seven-day [bus pass]....If I could come every day, I would.”

—Youth #10

Teens who regularly visited the space described YOUmedia as a “safe” space to hang out, where they had the opportunities to develop and learn through self-expression.

“[It's] a gathering space for teens to come together. Like, they can be just something educational and not just hang around in the streets. Read a book. Or just hang out together. And I think it's like a good safe environment for that.”

—Youth #13

“[YOUmedia] help[s] kids get their creative side out. Keep people off the streets. You know, just a general place for people to hang where they don't have to worry about adults being all in their face or somebody being on some other stuff. It's just a chill spot where you can get stuff done.”

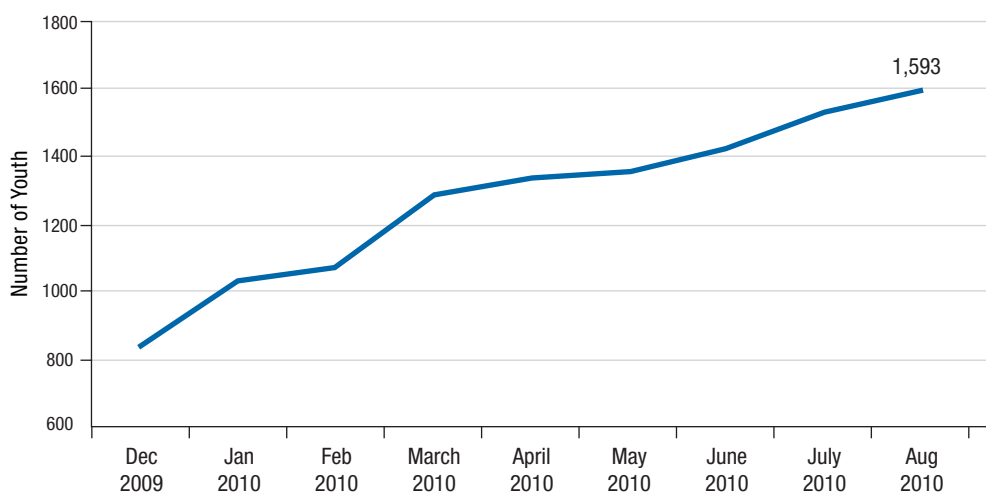
—Youth #10



## Youth Participation

Despite YOUmedia’s idiosyncratic approach to recruitment, evidence suggests that participation increased throughout the first year. While teens are free to simply enter the space and hang out, staff encouraged youth to complete registration forms. Youth were also required to complete a registration form in order to participate online. In Year 1, however, there was no official process for collecting walk-in data—even among those who had registered.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, registration data reflect a constant increase in participation from YOUmedia’s opening to the close of its first year (see Figure 3). Between October 2009 and August 2010, 1,593 teens registered for YOUmedia. Of those who reported demographic information, 47 percent were male and 53 percent were female. The majority of those who reported race were African American (64 percent). Comparatively, the overall CPS student population during the 2009–10 school year was 50 percent male and 45 percent African American.<sup>21</sup> The graph below shows the progressive increase in total registration numbers from December 2009 through August 2010. From staff, we know that attendance patterns varied weekly and seasonally; students from a nearby school dominated the population during the week, while students from more distant locations visited more on weekends and during the summer.

**FIGURE 3**  
**YOUmedia Registration Numbers**



Chance sightings and word of mouth appeared to be the major ways in which youth discovered YOUmedia.

Though staff did not systematically track participation, interviews and observations did reveal particular patterns. Most pronounced is that at any given time the majority of teens chose to be in the hanging out space. Observations, for instance, note that the majority of teens were playing video games, talking with friends, or checking Facebook. As one of the ultimate goals of YOUmedia was to encourage youth to move towards advanced use of digital media, staff also reported that a substantial number of these “hanging out” teens also engaged in “geeking out” YOUmedia activities by attending workshops, messing around with tools, creating and posting digital media artifacts, and commenting in the online space. As we discuss later, for those who did not engage in geeking out with media, hanging out and messing around provided entry points for staff and peers to engage youth around interests in an effort to encourage development and learning.

Given the flexible nature of the use of the space, teens could also limit their participation to specific projects. For instance, teens who visited YOUmedia through school groups came to the space only a few times to participate in a specific project. Alternatively, there were teens who participated exclusively or primarily with YOUmedia through the online space. Staff explained that the teens who participated primarily online faced transportation issues or just wanted a space to broadcast their work.

### Staff: Multi-dimensional Expertise Used to Manage a Youth-Driven Space

At its inception, leadership believed that having knowledgeable adults to guide youth participation was a critical piece of the YOUmedia structure. Staff, which included both librarians and DYN mentors, possessed specific expertise related to either libraries or digital media. In addition to these skills sets, staff had also spent time working in learning environments (e.g., libraries or schools) or in the professional media world. For instance, one staff member held a bachelor’s degree in film studies and a master’s degree in library science, with a concentration in educational gaming. Another staff member, who was a long-time poet and a professional photographer, had worked in numerous school settings. Complementing these formal credentials was an informal use of and interest in digital media. All staff reported personally utilizing technology in ways that were comparable to teen engagement—a practical knowledge base that was put to daily use in working with the teens.



Each staff member took on roles that were specific to his or her organization. One CPL staff member, for example, described responsibilities for duties specific to maintaining the library, such as scanning in or checking out books, providing new library cards, and helping with collection development. Meanwhile, DYN mentors described their work in developing YOUmedia programming within the space and supporting the use of digital media tools. These distinctions were less salient in observations and interviews, in part because much of this division dealt with behind-the-scenes work. All staff, however, explicitly identified working with teens and supporting their development as their primary responsibility. As one staff member said, “That’s what this whole job entails—working with teens.” Another noted how this shared purpose sometimes blurred the roles between mentors and librarians:

“Librarians do have kind of a mentorship role with the teens. And...I feel like the mentors also have kind of a librarian relationship with the teens, too, in terms of recommending books and helping them with the collection. [I’m] not sure the kids know the distinction between librarian and mentor.”

—Staff member

### Establishing and Maintaining Boundaries in a Youth-Driven Space

Although the imagined social environment of YOUmedia was articulated as one where youth interests would motivate learning, staff worked to establish and enforce rules in order to make the space work productively. Thus, while staff were attentive to teen interests and ideas, there were limitations in how teens could interact in the space.



YOUmedia had formal policies posted in the library location and online, outlining how to access resources and how to conduct oneself appropriately when at YOUmedia. Staff also imposed ad-hoc rules and guidelines around profanity, derogatory or violent imagery, and other acts that threatened the safe conditions of the space. In talking about a teen who persisted in posting songs with derogatory lyrics, one staff member said:

“I had to keep telling him, ‘Man, that’s not the message you’re trying to put out....Put something with a better, like, positive [spin].’ I started noticing he started cleaning up his act a little bit.”

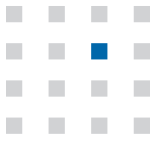
—Staff member

There was little outright resistance to formal policies from teens during YOUmedia’s first year, but the enforcement of rules served as a filtering process for determining which teens remained in the space over time.

“[At one point] we [had] like, disruptions....That kind of phased out when certain policies were put in place—like you have to put things in a locker. They realized that this isn’t just like, a free-for-all. There are security [officers] here [that] are paying attention. You do have to lock your stuff up. You can’t cuss. You do have to take off your hat. You do have to put your coat away. And then, those people who really wanted to be here, and wanted to be a part of that creative and productive community, those are the students who stayed.”

—Staff member

Yet, staff remained flexible about the rules, reevaluating them regularly in response to how teens used the space. For example, a set of rules emerged in response to the popularity of audio production equipment. Novice users lacked the necessary skills to properly use these tools, frequently damaging this equipment (e.g., turntable needles). So, staff developed a certification process for using this equipment to reduce damages. The flexibility and reflexivity around rules meant that staff could continue to maintain a safe and functional environment, even as the use of the space evolved.



# Activities and Resources that Support Youth Creativity

Staff intentionally designed structured activities to provide opportunities for learning. These were coupled with unstructured opportunities and resources that supported exploration.

As staff maintained the safety of the space, they also structured the environment as one where youth felt comfortable learning and expressing themselves. Staff organized workshops, special events, and other planned or structured activities as well as provided unstructured time and space for teens to explore digital media. Both these structured and unstructured activities relied on the existence of resources.

## Learning and Production through Structured and Unstructured Interest-Driven Activities

In its first year, staff organized more formal activities (e.g., workshops and competitions) that included performances, author visits, and projects. With students being out of school, program leaders and staff used summer vacation as an opportunity to introduce new structured activities. (See Appendix C for a full list of structured activities during the 2009–10 year.)

While structured activities provided a formal entry point to learning, the space also allowed for a number of unstructured activities, particularly for teens who were hanging out or messing around. Through these unstructured activities, teens produced videos, songs, and poems. Teens sometimes created these projects independently, but they also accessed staff to support the development and creation of these projects. The range of activities provided youth with choices and opportunities that, when identified, matched their personal interests.

## Having the Right Resources to Support Creative Production

A key to motivating youth to take part in these structured and unstructured activities was the availability of resources. In its first year, YOUmedia provided youth with a range of tangible resources, such as books, computers, cameras, creation software, and a recording studio. In addition, teens could access the knowledge



and guidance provided by mentors, librarians, and peers. Lastly, the physical space of YOUmedia served as a resource. One teen describes feeling impressed by a first encounter with YOUmedia’s expansive space:

“The first time I came in, I was really surprised. It’s a really large space for a library...This is a large space for just teens. And then, looking around as someone who uses technology, I was [like] ‘Wow, this is some cool stuff here.’ It’s really vibrant in here....It just looked like a really cool place.”

—Youth #11



A flyer for a competition where youth re-designed Burnham’s plan for Chicago using digital tools.

While access to traditional and digital media resources was an explicit component of YOUmedia and an attraction for some teens, there were limitations to the type of resources available to the space. For instance, program leaders made the decision to use web-based programs (e.g., Google Docs and the Aviary suite of production tools) over more popular licensed software. Such programs are often free or less expensive than software with exclusivity rights. These programs not only have reduced costs but also eliminate storage concerns since documents are stored online and do not require regular updates that installed software requires. However, limiting use to these software programs also meant that youth did not have access to key resources—software that was commonly used for particular types of creation and production.

### Youth-Created Digital Media Products

Through engagement with a range of traditional and digital resources, interested teens learned how to use new technologies to create original digital media artifacts. This process of creation supported further development of digital-specific skills and problem-solving skills as individuals encountered and overcame production-related barriers—explicit intended outcomes for YOUmedia developers.<sup>22</sup> Many products were the result of collaborative work, and improvements were made through iterative processes as teens received critiques from each other and revised their artifacts to reflect this feedback.



Like other artistic or communicative products, these artifacts provided an outlet for youth to express ideas, experiences, and viewpoints to entertain, inform, and persuade others. Examples of artifacts include podcasts of game reviews, poetry, original songs inspired by contemporary literature, how-to videos using sign language, and “webisodes” exploring a range of topics relevant to teens. (For examples of past products, visit YOUmedia’s Featured Media site at [http://youmediachicago.org/featured\\_contents](http://youmediachicago.org/featured_contents).) In the quotes below, students reflect on their creations, showing how YOUmedia gave them opportunities for collaboration and creativity:

[In a workshop focused on women and media]: “We wrote a story about an issue in society or in our lives personally. We turned that into a movie. But it’s not just like reporting. It’s more like taking pictures and putting them together in like, stop motion....It’s like a short film.”

—Youth #22

“A project I did with [another teen]. He’s a rapper....I co-engineered this particular project, and I also sang on it....It was an inspirational song. And he rapped on it and I sang the chorus. And it was just a wonderful experience. Like, just me having the flexibility and freedom to be able to write my verse and sing my chorus. It really meant something to me. And being able to engineer it and make it sound wonderful.”

—Youth #12



## Unexpected Pieces: What Made YOUmedia Work?

Staff responsiveness to teen interests, along with youth-staff and peer-to-peer relationships, acted as the catalysts to deepen youth engagement.

The original theory of action (See Figure 1) highlighted the need for interest-driven interactions with mentors and peers that would lead to creative production. We found, however, that two aspects of YOUmedia were more nuanced than originally envisioned—relationships and responsiveness.

It was initially thought that just “being in the space” would prompt curiosity to motivate participation and seek out resources, including staff expertise, to learn and create. But, we found, and staff confirmed, that teens did not automatically link personal interests with the traditional and digital resources YOUmedia offered. Developing relationships, therefore, was a necessary component to understanding youth needs: It allowed staff to learn about teen interests and connect those interests with existing activities. Given the relationships that formed, staff were also able to be appropriately responsive to the interests and needs of the teens in the space. This responsiveness afforded staff with the ability to strategically create opportunities that aligned with the ways in which youth were interacting with YOUmedia.

The process of building relationships and an openness to being responsive enabled the staff to redesign learning opportunities around youth interests. This section describes the ways in which staff deliberately thought about developing relationships with participating teens and how flexible and responsive they were to ever-changing conditions, particularly as different youths entered into YOUmedia with different needs.

### Building Relationships

As youth were participating in activities that were most often unstructured “hanging out” activities, staff intentionally developed relationships by taking an interest in teen hobbies. Staff also encouraged learning by making relevant suggestions about activities to teens. More experienced or interest-driven youth also did the same. These developing relationships seemed to further encourage participation, learning, creative thinking, and original digital production.

Given the relationships that formed, staff were also able to be appropriately responsive to the interests and needs of the teens in the space.





## Youth-Staff Relationships

The initial vision of YOUmedia called for interactions between youth and mentors, but researchers observed a type of intentional relationship-building that moved beyond simple support. Staff worked to get to know each teen individually and to design learning opportunities that fit with his or her specific needs. These relationships also began to create a sense of a community at YOUmedia, even though different teens might appear during different days of the week. Beyond just teaching youth through structured and unstructured activities, staff carefully and successfully identified common interests that could be leveraged with teens to forge deeper personal relationships. Once staff found those connection points, teens perceived the adults as “cool” and appreciated the expertise each staff member had to offer. In the following quotes, teens illustrate from their perspectives how they viewed staff and the kinds of relationships that formed.

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you like best [about YOUmedia]?

**YOUTH #4:** The staff.

“We [a staff member and I] have this inside joke now that only me, him, and [another staff member] know. One day these kids were playing a game. They were in the middle of it, and they’d been going—doing this for like five minutes....They were like ‘We’re almost there. We’re almost there.’ He was like, ‘Hey guys, there’s five minutes left [until we close]’. And he pressed the button and it went off...like doooooosh! Now, every time we see each other, it’s just like—we just go into it for no reason—just like, ‘Hey guys there’s five minutes left. You don’t have to—doooooosh.’ It’s hilarious.”

—Youth #2

“I’ve seen the librarians actually sitting down with [teens]—and really helping the students....I’ve seen the mentors actually, you know, teaching—teaching as a teacher in an actual school building should do. So, it’s a space for teens to really just get help or just get relief. Come in and get reprieve.”

—Youth #12

Staff attention to teen interests and activities ultimately supported participation and production, including activities youth were involved in outside the space:

“There’s a young lady who came in with an outside event and was signed up to the social network and then I would see her posting different things—different drawings, photographs, whatever. And just after commenting for awhile, I was like, ‘Hey, you know, I teach this design workshop. You should come out and check it out.’...And she did.”

—Staff member

“I’m amazed how much they follow-up on my recommendations. Especially games....I love dorky, weird adventure games that most mainstream gamers do not play. But they’ve...actually gone home and played the games I recommend.”

—Staff member



YOUmedia Records is a student-managed record label that is based in-house.

### Peer-to-Peer Relationships

In addition to these developing relationships between youth and staff, there were two types of peer-to-peer relationships at YOUmedia: existing friendships that influenced awareness of and engagement with YOUmedia and new peer relationships forged through YOUmedia participation.

Friends expanded the experiences of other teens by motivating exploration and production. At times, teens would encourage other friends to join a workshop they were attending or suggest YOUmedia as a space to further develop their already-existing interests.

“My friend pulled me in [to a workshop] and was all like, ‘You should be here.... I was just there to check it out.’ I visited the tech portion of it [the workshop]—not really the gaming but researching. And, you know, that’s when I started playing a little bit more games.”

—Youth #22

Alternatively, sometimes teens chose to not reveal YOUmedia to others in their peer networks. Several teens described how they restricted conversations about YOUmedia to reduce disruption in the space.

“[I have purposely not told] the people in my neighborhood that are gang-affiliated [about YOUmedia]. Because I know that the mentors here—they don’t want to have any stir. The security officers—they don’t want to have trouble here....I don’t wanna be the cause of the trouble for them being here and stirring up trouble.”

—Youth #20

Teens also forged new relationships, which expanded their social networks and motivated further exploration and learning. Observations and interviews contain instances of collaboration and critique in which new peer relationships supported production knowledge and skills, moving youth from being consumers of digital media to being creators with digital media. One teen describes how an interaction with a teen he did not know led to the creation of a new song:

“Yesterday I came in. I wasn’t really feeling a song coming out of my heart. I wasn’t feeling a beat coming out of my hands....I went out and I started looking around. And it just so happened that there was a young lady sitting at the piano outside the studio, playing. And it seemed that she was singing along. I approached her and I asked her if she wanted to come into the studio. And she said yes. And so I asked her what does she do? She said she sings and plays the piano....I just got to know her.... She told me that she had a song that she really wanted to get out. And so, what I did with her is, we engineered a beat from scratch. We made her song go from nothingness—just in her head—into a full-fledged production. She recorded that song and took it home and played it for her friends.”

—Youth #12

With the ever-changing dynamic of who visited the space, the librarians and mentors were well aware that the environment would never be static. Their answer was to respond to those changes flexibly.

## Responsive Design and Teaching

Because of the initial relationships that they developed with teens in the first few months, mentors and librarians quickly realized the need to be even more responsive to YOUmedia participants. With the ever-changing dynamic of who visited the space, the librarians and mentors were well-aware that the environment would never be static. Their answer was to respond to those changes flexibly, while continuing to maintain a safe and productive culture of learning and expression.

One example of this flexibility concerned the structured workshops, which were intended to provide an ongoing opportunity for teens to explore their interests while also building skills and knowledge. However, about three months after YOUmedia’s inception, staff noticed that teens were reluctant to attend workshops.

“[We would] go out and kind of try to recruit an audience for that [the workshop] by just walking around making the announcement. ‘Hey, this workshop is about to start. And this workshop is about to start.’ They [the teens] didn’t care.”

—Staff member

Because youth saw them as “cool” collaborators, mentors were able to approach teens and inquire about the kinds of activities that would interest them the most. In response to teens’ replies, staff began to intentionally build workshops and other structured activities around teen interests. Staff also reflected on their experiences with the group, realizing that they would need to move away from an adult-structured model of teaching to one that was more interactive and amenable to teen interests. One staff member described her change in workshop design after contemplating what would benefit the teens the most:

“They didn’t want to write the [game] review because it felt like homework. So, I [thought] how do I make this easier? Because the whole idea behind the workshop was that if they think critically about what they’re playing, then we kind of take the game playing experience to another level. They start to understand games, think critically about them, break them down, and they’ll be better game players. And it will help them if they move into game design, because they’ll know the elements of the game.... So in January I decided to just throw out the blog part of it and switch to podcast. They’re really comfortable talking about games, not necessarily writing at this point, so I decided to do the podcast as a way to make it easier for them to have that conversation and think critically about games.”

—Staff member

Instead of running workshops that provided direct skill instruction that resulted in projects, staff began to offer workshops in which teens could create, design, build, and invent *through* projects. Much like other forms of project-based learning, staff observed teens throughout the creative process to find moments when they could teach new skills and production processes. Teens typically asked questions during the production process and staff capitalized on these opportunities to demonstrate techniques, which created a context of collaborative learning rather than more formal demonstrations.



Flyer for a project in which youth created messages against violence.

With the large number of teens spending time hanging out and messing around, there were also ample opportunities for informal learning to take place. Because of the relationships that staff developed with teens and the flexible way they approached teaching and learning, they began to actively identify unplanned opportunities for development and support. In this way, staff seized upon learning moments that arose as teens were messing around with various digital media or hanging out with friends. Below is an example of a staff member taking advantage of a non-structured activity to encourage further participation:

“The first day [I came here] I was kinda just like pressing the [piano] keys and stuff—just playing around. But then like, [a staff member] showed me this song. It was called “Requiem for a Dream.”... I played the guitar and the way I play is by looking at other people play. And so I play by ear, too, so just hearing and seeing. It’s just how I learn. So I went on the Internet and watched someone while they played it. And that’s really how I picked up on that.”

—Youth #2





## Outcome: Dynamic Learning Environment

Building from its original theory of action, YOUmedia evolved into a space that placed youth in a cycle of learning that was motivated by access to staff, other teens, and digital media.



The combination of relationship-building and staff responsiveness motivated and sustained involvement and production at YOUmedia,<sup>23</sup> creating a dynamic learning environment for participating teens. We have shown that staff were intentional about building relationships with and among teens with a focus on their interests. We also outlined the ways in which staff used teen interests and preferences to design and re-design YOUmedia's learning opportunities. This flexible and responsive stance that staff assumed, observable not only in the structured activities but also in unstructured activities and rules, encouraged and provided youth with the opportunity to take ownership of their digital media products. We find evidence that this kind of engagement encouraged further participation. Concretely, we found that youth were encouraged to participate in new activities, collaborate with others, mess around and geek out with more advanced production software, and expand their social networks. We argue that the growth that occurred at YOUmedia was the result of teen embeddedness in a cyclical process of learning that was motivated by access to staff, other teens, and digital media and its tools. It is important to note that not all teens experienced YOUmedia in the same way. Many teens we observed and interviewed were content with hanging out, either with the media or with their friends. One of the limitations of this Year 1 study is that data on individual student development over time were not collected. Yet, observations and interviews with program members, including teens, provide evidence of the growth and development of teens who engaged in the previously described cycle of learning.

For teens who collaborated with others, this engagement spurred the development of additional interests and learning. Such learning-through-collaboration was consistent with some of the diffuse learning goals articulated by project leaders. The process of collaboration helped teens learn how to be part of a community, while it simultaneously supported individual growth as teens become educated consumers of each other's work.



“The fact that they’re willing to engage in projects here that engage them in their own community is a success. The fact that they’re willing to collaborate with others on everything as simple as playing a chess game to creating a very, very interesting and complicated video with music...that to me is a success.”

—CPL Leadership

Another articulated goal was to move teens from hanging out with digital media and/or their friends to a more engaged form of activity. By moving teens along a trajectory towards messing around or geeking out with digital media, staff and leadership hoped that teens would become creators and producers. Indeed, staff did see this movement from hanging out to messing around.

“We got the kids who were only hanging out to participate in workshops. And they became our top group of participating students. We learned how to take what was the biggest distraction, which were video games, and turn it into our biggest avenue for students participating in other stuff.”

—Staff member

As staff worked to engage teens in collaboration and more serious uses of digital media, they also aimed to teach interested teens digital media production skills. These skills would then allow for further engagement as teens translated these skills into independent production through which teens could creatively express their own feelings about, experiences with, and perceptions of the world. One youth describes how, through participation in YOUmedia, his production skills improved—thus enabling growth of his own self-expression.

“First, I’ve learned how to work GarageBand in and out. And then I learned some...tricks and techniques of recording, like, some of the more intricate steps that you need to really get a good sound out of it and get good professional sound out of it....I’ve recorded enough to make a CD really....You can actually tell the difference between the first music [I created]. I’ve developed myself—not only my skills with the technology—but I’ve developed my vocal skills also [by] being in here so much and recording so much.”

—Informal interview with teen, 2-27-10

Furthermore, YOUmedia leadership and staff observed teens experimenting and expanding their interests and expertise as they participated in YOUmedia activities. YOUmedia leaders, staff, and teens started to connect this new set of skills with more traditional academic outcomes and trajectories.

“This kid likes to blog and [a staff member] said, ‘Well why don’t you start blogging about some of these games that we have?’...He moved from Rock Band to blogging, and then [the staff member] was really critiquing his blogs and helping him with his writing skills. We’ve seen his writing skills really increase.”

—CPL Leadership

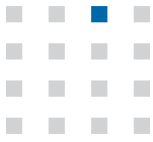
“Last week...I was really busy working with getting ready for college. I wouldn’t have been getting ready for this college opportunity if it had not been for YOUmedia really....I’m going to the Art Institute for audio production. And I was not thinking about audio production eight months ago.”

—Youth #12



As depicted in the observed model (see Figure 2), adults in the space built and supported the development of relationships, which in turn enabled adults to be more responsive to teen interests. These efforts created a dynamic learning environment. Within this environment, participating youth learned skills, how to work with others, and how to develop their own sense of self-expression.





# Challenges in Year 1

As in all new organizations, YOUmedia faced challenges in its first year including defining staff roles, encouraging in-space and online participation, and supporting youth development with the “right” resources.

No new venture is absent of challenges. While many struggles at YOUmedia were difficult to observe outright, staff and teens reflected on aspects of YOUmedia that could be improved or were difficult to overcome. These challenges included internal organizational communication about staff roles, how to support a large audience of teens with sustained engagement over time, how to support more integrated use of the online space, and the availability and maintenance of resources.

## Ever-Changing Roles of Staff

The responsive model that developed over time proved to be a challenge for part-time staff to execute. Although building relationships was a key component of YOUmedia’s success with teens, part-time staff expressed feeling challenged in translating their interests, skills, and knowledge into a format that overlapped with those of teens. Since these staff members were in the space less often than full-time staff—one to three days a week—they had fewer opportunities to observe and meet with teens to identify interests and create more responsive approaches. One staff member expressed this mismatch below:

“I guess I was doing a lot of things that people weren’t interested in, to be honest. Or at least it didn’t make sense....I never was able to really convey [my vision].”

—Staff member

Another important factor in YOUmedia’s success was the importance of having staff members who could be flexible. In fact, for one staff member, the uncertainty of ever-changing roles was closely connected to YOUmedia’s organic nature:

“I think there are some things that will become routine. There are some...elements of the program that will always be new because we’re gonna get a new group of students every year. And having new kids each year is gonna present its own, fresh set of challenges and opportunities to do cool stuff.”

—Staff member



However, as YOUmedia became more of a dynamic teaching and learning space, part-time staff expressed confusion about changing roles and responsibilities that led to difficulties in planning and supporting teens:

“Somehow, the expectations [for my role] have changed, but it’s not clear what they are. At least that’s how I feel. I don’t know what that means.”

—Staff member

## Supporting Sustained Use of YOUmedia

Staff overcame the initial workshop attendance problems with a more responsive learning design to recruit teens. However, as the year progressed, a related problem—consistent attendance—emerged. The lack of steady attendance within a workshop or project further inhibited learning and production.

“Attendance is a big one [challenge]—from just getting them to show up to [retention]—not retention in the sense that they leave, but retention in the sense that there was a kid who was really involved and then he got a girlfriend. And then...the only day [he] can hang out with [his] girlfriend is the same day as the workshop, so [he] hangs out with [his] girlfriend.”

—Staff member

As a voluntary program, YOUmedia must compete with other responsibilities and interests that compete for a teen’s time and attention.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is there anything that keeps you from visiting YOUmedia more often?

**YOUTH #8:** School and tiredness. And I just finished my ACT, so I was working up towards that. And then after—I was just so burnt out. Like, oh my God, like, going home and going to sleep.

Staff found themselves balancing their roles as collaborators with that of managers to help more active teens juggle other commitments and involvement with YOUmedia. This included awareness of youth who were visiting YOUmedia when they should have been in school and monitoring students to ensure they completed homework.

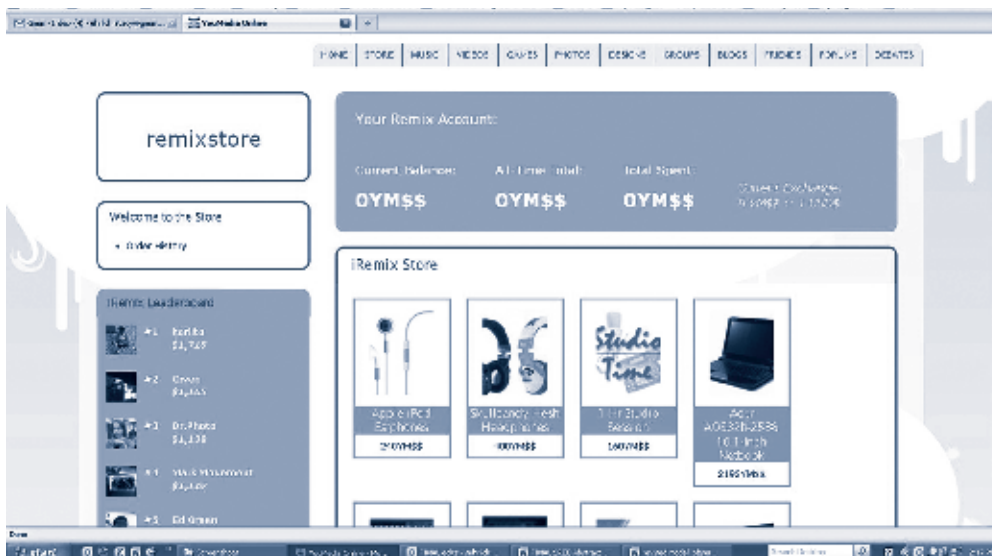
“The other challenge is making sure that the students who do start participating are still balancing their school work. We will see dips in attendance around times the grades come out....And then for some we do have to remind them to have homework time before they start playing a video game, before they go to the workshop....We just do that check-in with them.”

—Staff member

## Encouraging Use of the Online Space

YOUmedia created its online social space to extend opportunities for teens to interact with peers and staff beyond the confines of the library’s physical location and operating schedule. According to program designers, the YOUmedia social networking site was intended to motivate and improve production with its incentive and feedback system.

Given the number of YOUmedia registrants (see Figure 3), our informal observations of the online space revealed that there was relatively low use of the site. While some teens were motivated to post their work to earn Remix dollars – an incentive that was intended to motivate learning through improvements made in response to others’ comments – only a small number of teens reported actually commenting on the work of their peers. Other teens avoided the website altogether, sometimes admitting that they prefer to post their work on Facebook. Staff also acknowledged their own limited use of the online space, even though it was their responsibility to encourage use of the site.



“We [YOUmedia] don’t qualify for any kind of discount because libraries aren’t educational institutions.”

—Staff Member

**INTERVIEWER:** And have you visited the website?

**YOUTH #8:** No....Usually when I’m on the computer, I usually only go on to do research, Yahoo, and Facebook. And then when I come [to the physical space], I just come here.

“They’re [the teens] not using the [YOUmedia] website. Getting them to use the website has been difficult....I’m finding out a lot of them don’t wanna use it. They don’t wanna navigate through it.”

—Staff member

In fact, not all staff used the iRemix site as intended. One person focused more on encouraging participation when in the physical library location of YOUmedia than through the online site:

“I’m more hands-off on the social network. They post their work, I give comments. It’s not me. I don’t find myself telling them, ‘Hey you should post this next.’ It’s sort of more side-to-side conversation on the social network, where we’re just talking about interests or whatever, and I’m just sort of looking at what they post, you know. I’m sure that’ll evolve to me suggesting other things. But in the [library] branch, I do a little more encouraging.”

—Staff member

## Resource Availability and Maintenance

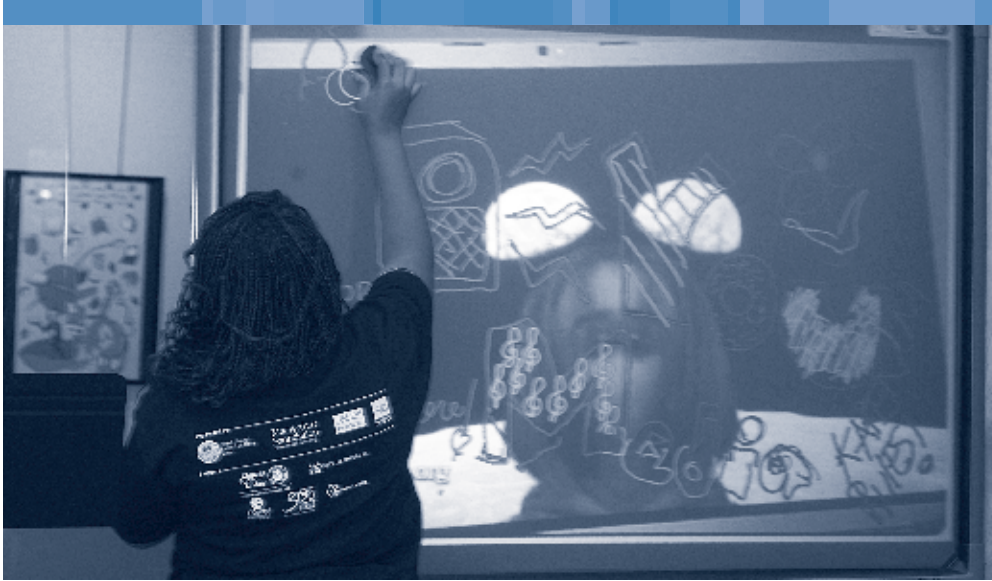
As discussed earlier in the report, decisions were made around which resources to provide in the space that affected how teens interacted with the space. For example, choosing free, web-based programs over more expensive (and perhaps more preferred) licensed software led to teen frustration regarding the limited software options. In response to this dissatisfaction, staff recognized how particular operational decisions might impact their ability to attract and retain youth of particular skill levels and interests.

“I’ve seen girls leave. Like a group of girls this week [said], ‘They don’t have [Microsoft] Word; we need to go.’”

—Staff member

“I bring it [Microsoft Office] up every once in a while [with leadership] to try to push it. And, I think we actually have a better argument now because of [the new literary magazine workshop] and having more writing happening in the space.”

—Staff member



“It’s hard to teach higher-level practices [with our resources]. We want things that are open source, that are available [but] the open source tools aren’t designed for advancement. They’re designed for entry-level projects. So, if you have students who are interested it’s hard to hook them, because we don’t have anything that we can teach them that they don’t already know how to do.”

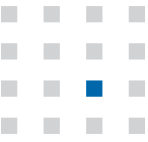
—Staff member

Staff also encountered challenges in teaching the basics of production because broken equipment hindered this process. While gaming console equipment and cameras were susceptible to damage, audio production equipment was most often in need of repair. In January, YOUmedia staff began to require teens to complete a certification process before they could use the music production equipment without the guidance of a staff member, in the hopes this would stem the tide of damage. But, this too had limitations since even certified teens were still learning and messing around with equipment. Items such as needles and microphones were broken and needed either repair or replacement.

“We’re going to allow kids to mess around with stuff that costs \$2,500 or needles that cost \$65 each. And, there’s only so much I can do in the certification process...but things happen. I mean, professionals break their needles.”

—Staff member

Purchasing new software and repairing hardware required financial resources. As one staff member explained, the issue of purchases and repairs was complicated by the fact that “we [YOUmedia] don’t qualify for any kind of discount because libraries aren’t educational institutions.”



## Conclusion

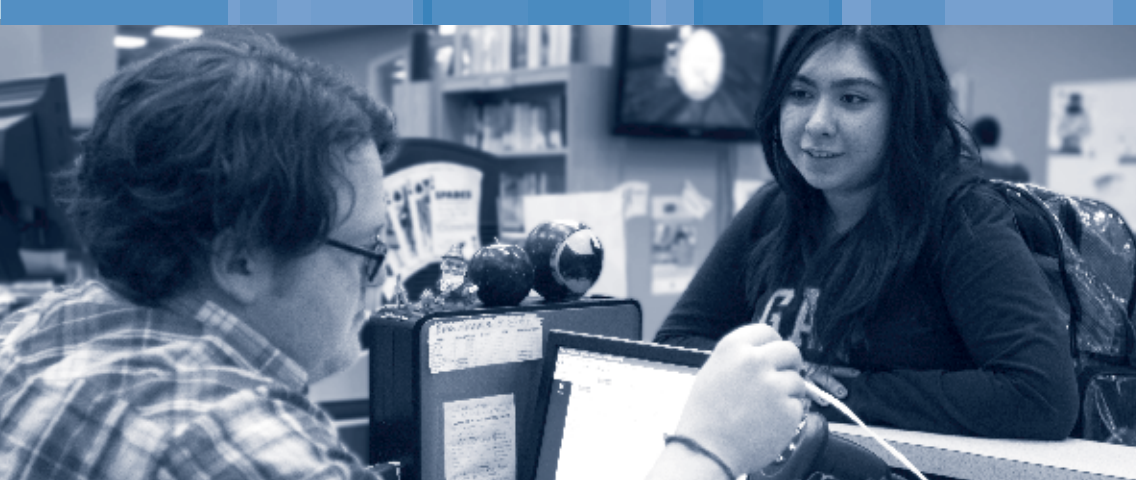
Through participation, production, and performance, YOUmedia presents opportunities for youth to engage in a cycle of learning. Future work will study the links between these forms of engagement and youth development.

In this snapshot of YOUmedia’s first year, we present key elements of the program and describe its early successes and challenges. We highlight its design as a space that accommodates the dominant forms of youth participation with digital media—hanging out, messing around, and geeking out—and the ways in which program leaders envisioned a public, social space to intentionally support various learning pathways for teens. Lastly, program designers imagined the YOUmedia staff, with the combined expertise of CPL staff and DYN mentors, as a critical source of knowledge and other resources that would spark curiosity, build interest, and motivate creation.



Our report also addresses the observed learning processes, which help to clarify the mechanisms operating in the original theory of action. In particular, we draw attention to the role of relationships in motivating youth engagement and how staff responded to teen interests and learning preferences to design activities. In the initial theory of action, structured activities, like workshops, provided standing opportunities for youth to increase skills and knowledge as they tinkered with digital tools and built digital media products using YOUmedia resources. Yet, as one staff member noted, “They [the teens] didn’t care.” Mentors and librarians created a more intentional model for youth engagement by connecting with the youth both socially and by using their expert knowledge around media. Gaining a new perspective through these relationships, effective staff members adapted the design of the space, the resources that were made available, and their teaching methods to meet the needs of the teens.

In examining the enacted model, the evidence suggests that a new sense of community is taking shape at YOUmedia. YOUmedia is distinct in the way it attracts and engages teens and attempts to “meet youth where they are” in terms of interests and skills. It embraces the need teens have to socialize and express themselves. Physical and online spaces, offerings of traditional and new media resources, mentor-led workshops and unstructured activities, and staff roles have all been designed around



the motivations and interests of today's increasingly tech-savvy and social-networked teens. Youth are coming to know the space as one that is not like school, yet has personally meaningful ways of learning new skills and gaining new experiences (i.e., through participation, production, and performance activities).

In its implementation, YOUmedia did face challenges balancing a youth-driven approach with an adult agenda for learning. We discuss how YOUmedia staff had to continuously develop ways to organize activities and assemble resources in order to help youth along a path of learning. Staff also had to create and maintain an exciting, youth-centered community in the physical space and online. As other YOUmedia sites emerge across the country, they too will need to grapple with similar challenges. This report foreshadows some of the decisions that leadership will need to make as these new locations open their doors.

This report and the work conducted by CCSR during YOUmedia's first year of implementation provide an introductory overview for our upcoming research. As we continue to study YOUmedia, we expect to learn more about how this community evolves and whether youth involvement in YOUmedia has impacts on teens' learning and development, both inside and outside of YOUmedia. To understand this, we will focus on understanding the larger Chicago context around teen digital media usage. In what ways are teens across the city of Chicago using digital media? Are there opportunities for expression through digital media in schools? Do schools see the use of technology and digital media as important for student learning and development? In the upcoming years, we will use the data we collect—both inside and outside of YOUmedia, obtained through a variety of methods such as observations, surveys, and case studies—to shed light on the pathways through which engagement in YOUmedia may be linked to a variety of learning outcomes, and the extent to which similar activities may be occurring in youth's traditional learning environments: schools.

The cross-institutional partnership that made YOUmedia possible reflects a commitment to harness the affordance of digital media technologies and formats to better support the way youth socialize, learn, and participate in society. Far more than just an effort to provide youth with access to technology, this endeavor is significant in its attempt to construct a way towards deep and sustained learning that is grounded in informal social interaction with peers and adult mentors. As YOUmedia takes shape beyond its first year, we expect to gain a better understanding about how youth learn and develop in this new kind of space. As digital media technologies become increasingly interwoven into the fabric of the daily lives of youth, the need to understand learning in an environment like YOUmedia becomes increasingly essential.





## Appendix A: Creation of Partnerships

YOUmedia is part of the Digital Media and Learning Initiative, which was launched by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Designed to provide out-of-school opportunities for learning and growth, the creation of YOUmedia involved three elements:

- **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS** Partners who worked together to develop the idea into a vision and a design.
- **TRUSTED PARTNERS** The collaborative design and financing of the YOUmedia space entailed partnerships between organizations that trusted each other.
- **COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION** The design process challenged the prevailing ideas of the participating organizations as they endeavored to establish something new.

With funding from the MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Learning (DML) Initiative, YOUmedia intentionally combines the resources of the Chicago Public Library (CPL), which is a public institution committed to lifelong learning, and the Digital Youth Network (DYN), which is a digital media literacy program. Through a complex blend of each organization’s knowledge and practices, YOUmedia provides a range of learning opportunities for youth.<sup>24</sup>

Before a full vision existed, the MacArthur Foundation gauged the interest of the Chicago Public Library regarding the possibility of creating a library space downtown around the use of various forms of media—digital and traditional. Having had previous desires for a “teen space” in the library, CPL responded enthusiastically. Thus began the vision for an engaging digital media space for teens in the downtown location of CPL. Once CPL was on board, MacArthur took several strategic steps to guide the development of the remaining partnerships.

The MacArthur Foundation was flexible around identifying the right partners for a new vision, resulting in partnerships that were mutually beneficial as they built on existing research as a framework.

### YOUmedia Foundation

The MacArthur Foundation sifted through potential partners for CPL. After deciding not to pursue other partners, the foundation invited DYN to join this project because it focused on youth engagement and digital media literacy. At the same time, members of DYN leadership were becoming increasingly interested in other applications of their DYN model, and the YOUmedia concept would allow them to reach a wider audience. The result of these combined interests, along with a serendipitous availability of physical space at the Harold Washington Library Center, was the formation of a partnership that was beneficial to all stakeholders.

### Mutually Beneficial Partnership

While libraries possess a vast number of resources to support lifelong learning, digital media learning constitutes a foray into new terrain for CPL. DYN, however, offered a set of solutions for working with youth and digital media that broadened CPL's vision of what a library could be:

“From the library’s perspective we had not been engaging teens in a real youth centered way... I don’t think we’re necessarily reaching kids where they live, which is online, you know. So, what we were doing was really quality work, but I think we just weren’t reaching our potential in being relevant to teens. And that’s I think what Digital Youth Network has given us. They’ve also given us a window and access to technology that we just didn’t have before. Sort of bringing the institution... in a different direction that’s informing our work in other ways. What we want to make available to people is what their library experience could become. [It] could be much more about making and doing and participatory and interest-driven learning, and not just necessarily a place where people come and consume information.”

—CPL Leadership

The partnership also offered opportunities for DYN. A principal attraction to YOUmedia was that it provided an opportunity for DYN members to work through a more robust version of their existing model in a space not directly linked to schools.

“It also gave us a challenge to try to continue on and try to innovate on [our] model...Can we take a similar approach, similar curriculum, similar activities, similar model and say not just do it in after-school space within a school? That goes back to the original charge of trying to create a framework that can be applicable by others in different contexts to do this type of work.”

—DYN Leadership

### Research-Based Framework

In addition to DYN’s research-based approach to teaching digital media literacy, research by Mimi Ito et al. was also integral to the design of YOUmedia.<sup>25</sup> This research provided a framework to meld the approaches of CPL, which provides an informal setting, with DYN’s more structured learning environment.

“...I know that a lot of other library spaces have teen spaces. One of my concerns was [that] I just didn’t want it to be a place where there was gaming in the form of Wii that would bring teens in for a while, but wouldn’t sustain [participation and engagement]...But MacArthur also brought to us the wonderful research [Ito et al.]...when we heard that and read about it, we thought that this really fit perfectly with our mission, as well as our idea of what we thought the teen space should be.”

—CPL Leadership

### Building on Prior Relationships

In the creation of the YOUmedia partnership, prior relationships provided a foundation of trust that supported this new endeavor. The belief in their joint vision grew as they saw evidence of that vision taking shape.

MacArthur senior leadership personnel noted that as they established partnerships, they drew on their existing relationships to move forward with the design and implementation of YOUmedia. For example, a senior leadership member of the MacArthur Foundation and a CPL leadership member had worked together in city government.

“They have a long working relationship, and a trusting relationship and I think whenever you start partnering or ask the commissioner of libraries of a large urban district to rethink the future of the library, you do that out of a trusting relationship, you don’t do that out of the blue.”

—MacArthur Leadership

Prior to the opening of YOUmedia, CPL and DYN engaged in a pilot period during which the organizations worked together on one of CPL's existing programs, "One Book, One Chicago." The success of this venture bolstered faith that the partnership would be productive for the organizations as well as for teens. The CPL Commissioner explained that even without the dedicated physical space of YOUmedia, the partners saw teens interacting with books in new ways, which increased their trust of DYN and in the YOUmedia model:

"And so [teens] created, and this was without the physical space that you saw. They created spoken word pieces. They created digital pieces. They created movies. They created a beautiful mural. So, we knew that this was a winner—to combine our world with the world of DYN—because we were able to prove it worked even without the physical space, which of course encourages even more collaboration."

—CPL Leadership

## Commitment to Innovation

While MacArthur, CPL, and DYN anchored the collaborative effort around YOUmedia, several other individuals and organizations were critical to its development. The result was a strategic partnership that combined knowledges of public spaces, teen engagement, and design to create an innovative space.

As this innovative vision began to take shape, all partners involved were willing to depart from existing organizational paradigms and redefine their prior boundaries.

Members of CPL leadership had to examine several previously unquestioned policies about how patrons use the library. One such policy, regarding the consumption of food in the library, illustrates the careful act of persuasion that took place between CPL and designers. New rules ultimately permitted teens to eat in specified sections of YOUmedia.

“...[A CPL staff member] would say, ‘Well there’s no food in the library.’...One of the designers from Carnegie Mellon would say, ‘Really, there’s no food in the library?...Okay, so let’s just imagine this...Kids have been in school all day, and they’re going to come straight here. They’re not going home, right?...And then what are they going to do? Do you think they’re going to be hungry?’ And she’d [the member of CPL]...say, ‘Well...yeah, they’re going to be hungry...and, well, they’re going to leave. Yeah, they’re going to leave!’ And [then] he’d say, ‘Well, then do you think, if they leave the first time, they’ll ever come back?’ And she’d say, ‘Well, probably not, unless the space is amazing.’ And then she’d pull out her BlackBerry and she’d email [her supervisor]. And she’d say, ‘The kids really need to eat in the space.’”

—MacArthur Leadership

In addition to eating and drinking in the library, partners also reimagined a number of other permissible activities. These included the volume at which people were allowed to talk and listen to audio, what belongings had to be stored in lockers, and even how to place books and other printed text throughout the space in ways that would maintain an atmosphere that would be inviting to teens.

These negotiations also pushed DYN to reframe their traditional ideas of a digital media space and the role of adults in the space. In DYN’s after-school model, students were not allowed to just hang out in the space; they were there to participate in a session or class in which an adult worked with them around a set of objectives. In libraries, however, patrons were free to simply hang out.

Accustomed to these more formal expectations of learning and the practices necessary to support those expectations, DYN mentors, along with CPL staff, were now charged with a different role:

“The mentor’s role now is to get to know kids and understand who they are and to try to connect them and link them to opportunities....They spend less time teaching formal workshops than they do [working] one-on-one and connecting students to programming that’s done by others.”

—DYN Leadership

## Appendix B: Research Methods

The project goals for this Year 1 implementation study were distinctly qualitative. The creation of YOUmedia involved a partnership among previously independent organizations with different approaches to youth engagement, and a physical design that simultaneously supported leisure and work-oriented activities in the same open-air space. While the development of YOUmedia was based on research, the program leaders' theory of action had yet to be articulated and tested. Program leaders had multiple ideas about the potential effect YOUmedia would have on teens, but these goals had not yet congealed into a shared set of expected outcomes. One goal of this implementation study is to understand in what ways, if any, YOUmedia supports learning—this is the question that drove our data collection in Year 1.

### Observations

Data collection during this first year of studying YOUmedia included observations and interviews collected between January 2010 and August 2010. Following initial observations in the fall of 2009, a research team conducted two-hour observations of YOUmedia for four to five days a week between 3 pm and 8 pm. Although YOUmedia opens at 1 pm Monday through Friday, we learned through our early observations and conversations with staff that teens typically did not arrive until after the end of school. Teens started to leave around 7 pm, even though YOUmedia closes at 9 pm. Also thanks to these initial observations and interviews, we learned that teen attendance was typically lowest on Fridays and Sundays, so we did not observe on these days.

These observations were conducted by one of three trained and experienced qualitative researchers who have backgrounds in sociology and anthropology. These individuals completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course for research involving human subjects. They met once a month with other members of the research team to discuss findings and adjust data collection processes.

Researchers observed formal and informal production activities and conducted informal interviews with staff and teens. During workshops and other structured activities, researchers were non-participant observers who documented events as they unfolded. This documentation involved active note taking and audio recordings. Researchers became participant observers for unstructured activities. On these occasions, researchers interacted with teens to discover what teens were doing, their motivations, and any successes or challenges they experienced with producing or consuming media. Informal interviews provided information about events we did not observe. These informal interviews also helped inform the formal interviews that we conducted. Over the course of these eight months, we collected more than 130 hours of observation on 65 occasions.

## Interviews

### Teens

We conducted anonymous interviews with 20 youth in the physical YOUmedia space. Interviews sought to collect information related to recruitment, the interest of teens in digital media and libraries, and their participation and production experiences in the space.

### Staff

All YOUmedia mentors and librarians were interviewed during the first year, including those who no longer work at YOUmedia. We interviewed a total of 15 staff members, which includes members of the security personnel. The interviews asked staff about their background experience and training for working in the space, how they designed formal activities, their practice of working with teens, their anticipated and observed outcomes for working with teens, and the individual and organizational challenges from this first year.

### Leadership

Leadership interviews were conducted towards the end of data collection in Year 1. They included leadership members of the MacArthur Foundation, the Chicago Public Library, and the Digital Youth Network. These interviews probed the history, development, and design of YOUmedia, along with their goals for participation and reflections on teen outcomes.

These interviews were conducted by the researchers who conducted the observations, along with CCSR senior research staff. All interviewers were trained and experienced.

## Coding and Data Analysis

Coding was conducted on all observation field notes and transcribed interviews.

### Field Notes Coding

Observers kept detailed field notes from each visit. After being transcribed, field notes were coded using Atlas TI. Coding schemes were initially created based on initial observation memos and on the goals articulated by leadership. Three individuals were assigned different coding categories. After each batch of 15 field notes was coded, they produced a summary report and drafted a memo. These memos were reviewed in monthly meetings to determine patterns and themes in how the codes were applied, which led to further refinement of the coding scheme.

### Interview Coding

A similar process took place around coding the leadership, staff, and teen interviews, excluding the creation of periodic summary memos. Codes were established to reflect the questions that were asked in the interview protocol. As with field notes, coders ran reports and identified patterns and themes in the data.



## Appendix C: Structured Activities at YOUmedia

In its first year, YOUmedia hosted a number of weekly and monthly workshops that offered learning opportunities reflecting teen interests in a range of media. In many workshops, activities blended the use of traditional and digital media resources. Much of this programming extended or built on existing opportunities offered through the cornerstone organizations.

**TABLE 1**  
**List of Workshops Offered between Fall 2009 and Fall 2010**

Program	Description
Change Society	The Change Society is about youth-created media, social networking, and connection (internal and external). By reaching out to the larger community, the Change Society seeks to have community residents, businesses, schools, and libraries working together to organize for improved conditions and opportunities for young people, the causes they wish to support, and the problems they seek to change in society. <a href="http://youmediachicago.org/3-activities/pages/33-project-groups">YOUmedia description of project groups website, http://youmediachicago.org/3-activities/pages/33-project-groups</a> , accessed Tuesday, December 21, 2010
Game Changers	Game Changers is a game design workshop and competition to create a level of Little Big Planet. <a href="#">YOUmedia online calendar of events</a> , accessed Monday, April 12, 2010
Digital Symphony	Explore digital production through live collaboration with artist Sound Conductor: NathanB. Create digital music, build tools, and more to construct unique and amazing sound experiences in public spaces. All you need to do is bring your talent and your creativity. <a href="#">YOUmedia May 2010 Calendar of Events</a>
Girl-illa	Girl-illa media is an opportunity for young women to experience Media Arts and Digital Technology within an active project environment that supports their development as authentic, self-defined women and future leaders in the digital realm. Project focus includes Photography, Creative Writing, Gaming, Design, Film-Making, and Community Outreach. <a href="#">YOUmedia May 2010 Calendar of Events</a>

Program	Description
iRemix Spoken Word	<p>Learn how to host, promote your own podcasts, and be part of the iRemix Radio team @ YOUmedia. Writers, Speakers, Bloggers, Debaters, Musicians, Photographers are all welcome to join in this teen radio project. Get a chance to record live from YOUmedia and get access to record and train at Vocolo Radio Station's home at Navy Pier.</p> <p><a href="#">YOUmedia May Calendar of Events</a></p> <p>Learn the art of reading, writing, critiquing, and performing poetry. Discover poetry as a performance art from the page to the stage. Learn how to use digital tools to produce your work online. Create your own CD, online publication, posters, and more.</p> <p>Updated October 2010</p>
Library of Games	<p>Like video games? Join the Library of Games (L.O.G.) video game journalism group. L.O.G. records a podcast every Monday at 3 pm and maintains the L.O.G. blog at <a href="http://www.youmediagames.blogspot.com">www.youmediagames.blogspot.com</a>. Bring your love of video games to YOUmedia.</p> <p><a href="#">YOUmedia May 2010 Calendar of Events</a></p> <p>Library of Games (LoG) is YOUmedia's very own video game podcast and blog group. If you are a gamer (hardcore or casual), come share your love of games with LoG. In the month of September, we will be accepting new blog and podcast contributors. On your first visit, be ready to talk about your favorite video games and about what games mean to you.</p> <p><a href="http://www.youmediagames.blogspot.com">For more information about LoG, visit www.youmediagames.blogspot.com</a> (updated October 2010)</p>
ReadMe	<p>Meets to discuss different texts. For May the group is reading the One Book, One Chicago selection, <i>Brooklyn</i>. Previous books include: <i>Hunger Games</i> and <i>Pride of Baghdad</i> (researcher's description)</p>
Sketch Book	<p>Sketch Book is an open Project Pod that will meet every other Monday to explore illustration as a pathway to Graphic Design and Animation</p> <p><a href="#">YOUmedia online calendar of events, accessed Monday, April 12, 2010</a></p>
Space Craft	<p>Space Craft is a workshop for students who are interested in design beyond the page. By exploring concepts of space and dimension, students will develop 3D design projects ranging from abstract themes to scenic design and modeling.</p> <p><a href="#">YOUmedia online calendar of events, accessed Monday, April 12, 2010</a></p>
Studio Masters	<p>Learn ProTools, GarageBand, and studio fundamentals essential to artists and producers in the twenty-first century. Earn your way to YOUmedia Studio Certification.</p> <p><a href="#">YOUmedia online calendar of events, accessed Monday, April 12, 2010</a></p>

Program	Description
<b>YOUmedia Records</b>	<p>YOUmedia Records all-day workshop. Learn how to effectively market yourself in the digital age. Also get some production tips from YOUmedia mentors and special invited guests.</p> <p><a href="#">YOUmedia May Calendar of Events</a></p>
<b>Teen Volume Book Discussion Group @ YOUmedia</b>	<p>A book discussion group for teens that meets monthly at YOUmedia. In addition to reading teen and young adult fiction, discussions incorporate current media and participants create digital arts projects that reflect on themes in the books they read.</p> <p><a href="#">Description of Teen Volume Book Discussion Group from Chicago Public Library's Event Calendar website, http://www.chipublib.org/events/details/id/55180/, accessed December 21, 2010</a></p>
<b>Reader's Theater</b>	<p>Reader's Theater features dramatic readings that, through inflection and gesture, bring the pages of a book to life. Teen volunteers on the Reader's Theatre Troupe are mentored by professional actors of the Promethean Theatre Ensemble working in partnership with Chicago Public Library staff. Troupe members build acting skills, gain exposure to great books, and earn community service-learning hours by participating in the project.</p> <p><a href="#">YOUmedia description of Teen Volume programming website, http://youmediachicago.org/3-activities/pages/38-teen-volume, accessed December 21, 2010</a></p>
<b>PhotoGenic</b>	<p>Show off your camera skills or come to learn a few. In PhotoGenic, we will not only take great photos but also will explore the world through a new pair of eyes and lenses. You will learn basic camera skills, do a bit of manipulation, and work in Photoshop. We will also learn the art of capturing the moment, maybe even play around with fashion/artistic portrait photography. Be prepared to get a little dirty! We will create digital portfolios and theme-based projects. Everyone needs a photographer so we will also discuss how to turn your new photo addiction into a way to earn money as young entrepreneurs!</p> <p><a href="#">We will meet every Tuesday from 3–4:30. (October 2010)</a></p>
<b>YouMedia Lit Mag</b>	<p><i>YouLit Magazine</i> is now YOUmedia's official online teen literary magazine. The magazine will be teen edited and teen contributed. That means all poetry, prose, creative non-fiction, photography, graphics, editing, and more will be completely by, from, and for teens. <i>YouLit Magazine</i> will be published quarterly online. This magazine is for anyone who writes, designs, reads, and enjoys all forms of literature, and being part of a production team.</p> <p><a href="#">Staff member, 10-11-10</a></p>
<b>Ones &amp; Twos Advanced</b>	<p><i>Ones &amp; Twos</i> is a beat production Improv workshop that meets from 3:30 pm–5 pm. This workshop is open not just to producers and songwriters but also to lyricists (rappers, poets, and everyone in between). The first 45 minutes will be spent learning necessary skills on different hardware and software. The last 45 minutes will be used to create songs on the fly!</p>

<p><b>Lyricist Loft</b> <i>Open Mic for Open Minds</i></p>	<p>Lyricist Loft is an open mic for high school teen spoken word artists, singers, and emcees to perform their work in a space for and about public expression. Our open mic is hosted by Dimi D and Fatimah from our iRemix Spoken Word program, and features select student and professional performers from across the city. Music is provided by DJ Talent &amp; DJ Such n Such.</p> <p><a href="#">October 2010</a></p>
<p><b>On the Money</b> <i>External Partner</i></p>	<p>Job-seeking and savvy teens in high school (ages 14–older) are invited to gain editorial and financial skills all-in-one through a presentation and monthly program series in which they’ll have fun while gaining experience writing about financial and career development topics with Economic Awareness Council and <i>TrueStar</i> Magazine. Presented in partnership with Chicago Public Library.</p> <p><a href="#">YOUmedia calendar of events, accessed Tuesday, December 21, 2010</a></p>

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## Endnotes

- 1 Ito, M., et al. (2008), and as final publication Ito, M. et al. (2009).
- 2 Rideout, V.J., U.G. Foehr, and D.F. Roberts (2010). Media use measured includes TV content, music/audio, computer, video games, print, and movies.
- 3 Rideout, V.J., U.G. Foehr, and D. F. Roberts (2010).
- 4 Warschauer, M. and T. Matuchniak (2010).
- 5 Lenhart, A., and M. Madden (2010).
- 6 Ito, M., et al. (2009), pp. 339–353.
- 7 Yowell, C. (2010).
- 8 Yowell, C. (2010).
- 9 Institute of Museum and Library Services (2009).
- 10 The Obama-Biden Transition Project (2010).
- 11 Ito, M. (2010).
- 12 Shelly, G.B., T.J. Cashman, G.A. Gunter, and R.E. Gunter (2007).
- 13 Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009).
- 14 Ito, M., et al. (2009).
- 15 The descriptions of the three genres of participation (hanging out, messing around, and geeking out) stem from Ito, M., et al. (2009), pp. 339–353.
- 16 Ito, M., et al. (2009).
- 17 Funding for this research was also provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.
- 18 Ito, M., et al. (2009), pp. 79–116, 339–353.
- 19 The Chicago Transit Authority offers reduced fare permits to students aged 12 years and older. However, these permits are only valid from 5:30 am through 8 pm on school days.
- 20 It is our understanding that the library will attempt to install a swipe-in system in the near future to help document how many teens interact with the YOUmedia space.
- 21 Based on data from the Office of Performance of the Chicago Public Schools that are available online at <http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/allschools.html> (accessed on December 16, 2010).
- 22 Some researchers have argued that it is through this type of production and interaction with others that learning occurs, as individuals solve production-related problems and receive feedback. See Jenkins, H. (2006) and Gee, J.P. (2004).
- 23 Although we do not fully know the extent of involvement, circulation data from CPL shows some evidence that youth participation in the space was vibrant. During its first year, there was an average of 836 instances per month of checked-out teen books, spoken word CDs, and YOUmedia equipment (e.g., laptops and cameras).
- 24 The design of YOUmedia involved other partners including Carnegie Mellon University and the Institute of Play.
- 25 Ito, M., et al. (2008); Ito, M., et al. (2009). Funding for this research was also provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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INFLUENCE CREATE MOTIVATE MENTOR LEARN ENGAGE TEACH  
SOCIALIZE PERFORM GROW INSPIRE INNOVATE COMMUNITY PLAY



## About the Authors

**Kimberly Austin** is completing her Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Chicago. Along with research on digital media and learning, she also examines the intersection of classroom practices and organizational change in schools. She holds a Master's degree in Sociology from the University of Chicago.

**Stacy B. Ehrlich** is a Senior Research Analyst for the Consortium. Her research interests include using quantitative and qualitative methods to measure student learning and growth. Along with the study of YOUmedia, she is investigating how the freshman on-track indicator predicts high school graduation for Chicago ELL students. Stacy holds a Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the University of Chicago.

**Cassidy Puckett** is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Northwestern University. Her research interests include methodological issues related to the study of digital inequality, individual and social determinants of technological competency, and the effects of technological competency on social inequality.

**Judi Singleton** is a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Anthropology at Northwestern University. She has researched and written about sexual violence in South Africa and HIV/AIDS in the African American community in Chicago.

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## About the Contributors

**Susan E. Sporte** is Associate Director for Evaluation and Data Resources at the Consortium on Chicago School Research. She holds an Ed.M. and an Ed.D. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research interests include high school reform and how adults in schools impact student learning.

**Penny Bender Sebring** is Founding Co-Director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research. She is coauthor of *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2010). She holds a Ph.D. in Education and Policy Studies from Northwestern University.

**Denise C. Nacu** is the Director of Design at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute. She is a designer and researcher of innovative technology tools for teaching and learning. She received her Ph.D. in education from the University of Michigan.

**Eric Brown** is a Research Analyst at the Consortium on Chicago School Research. His research interests include family and community level-interventions to improve educational outcomes for students in inner-city schools. Eric received an M.A. from The University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration.

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[ccsr.uchicago.edu](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu)

1313 East 60th Street

Chicago, Illinois 60637

T 773-702-3364

F 773-702-2010

### Our Mission

The Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. CCSR encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.

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